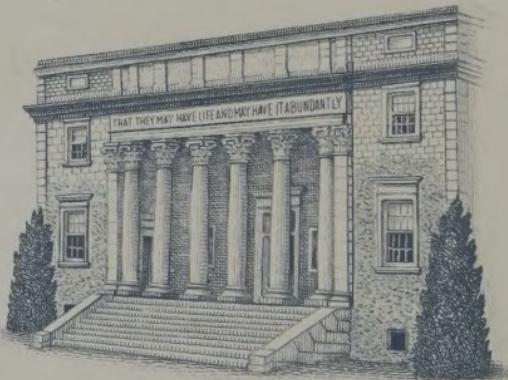


THE COLLECTED NOVELS  
AND STORIES OF  
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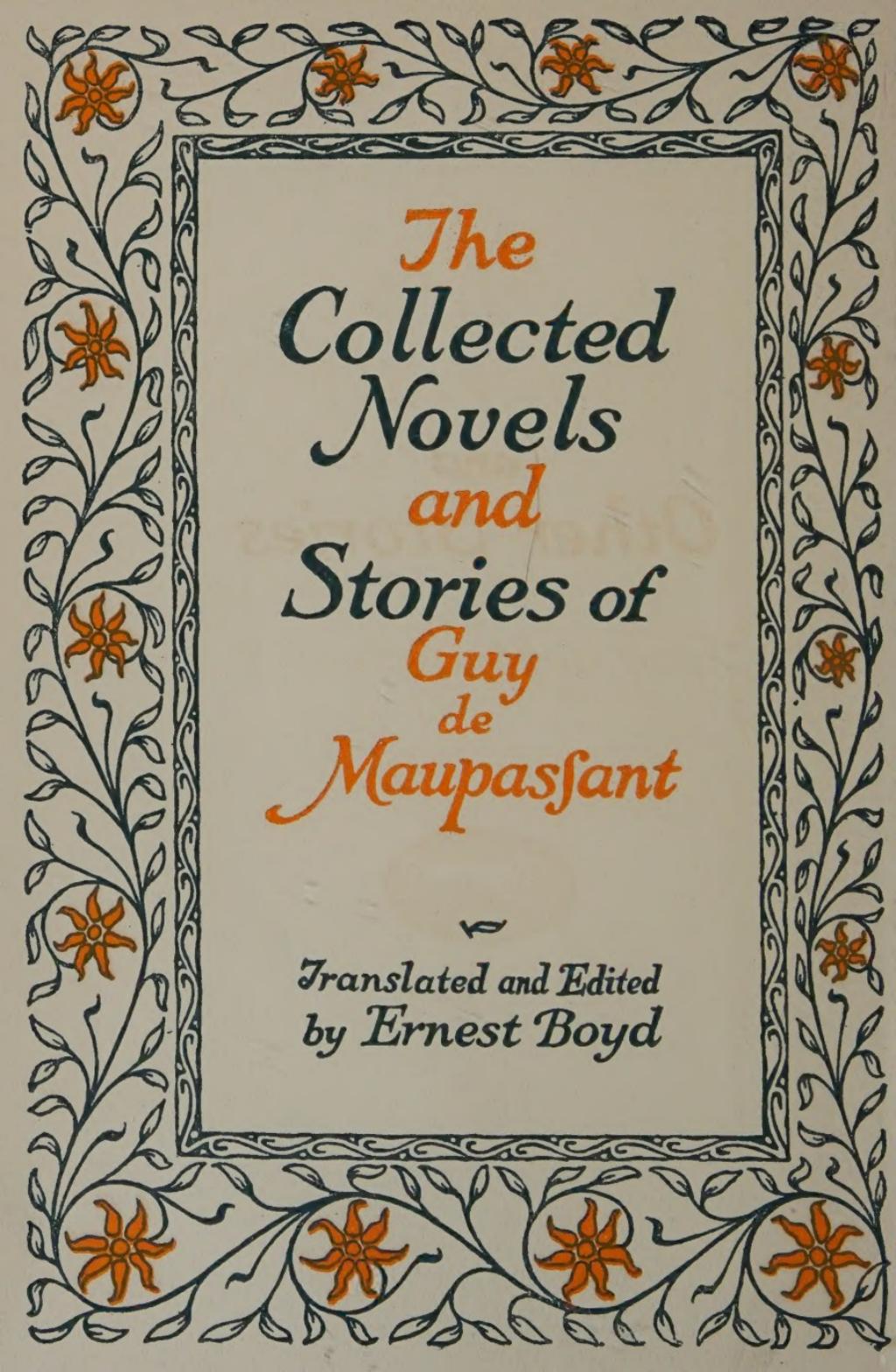


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MISS HARRIET  
AND OTHER STORIES



The  
Collected  
Novels  
and  
Stories of  
*Guy  
de  
Maupassant*

Translated and Edited  
by Ernest Boyd

Miss  
Harriett  
and  
*Other Stories*  
by  
Guy de Maupassant



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## MISS HARRIET

**T**HREE were seven of us in the drag, four women and three men, one of whom was on the box seat beside the coachman. We were following, at a walking pace, the winding coast road up the hill.

Having set out from Étretat at daybreak, in order to visit the ruins of Tancarville, we were still half asleep, benumbed by the fresh air of the morning. The women, especially, who were little accustomed to early rising, let their eyelids fall every moment, nodding their heads or yawning, quite insensible to the glory of the dawn.

It was autumn. On both sides of the road the bare fields stretched out, yellowed by the corn and wheat stubble which covered the soil like a badly shaved beard. The misty earth looked as if it were steaming. Larks were singing in the air, while other birds piped in the bushes.

At length the sun rose in front of us, a bright red on the edge of the horizon; and as it ascended, growing clearer from minute to minute, the country seemed to awake, to smile, to shake and stretch itself, like a young girl leaving her bed in a white chemise of vapour. The Comte d'Etraille, who was seated on the box, cried:

"Look! look! a hare!" and he stretched out his arm to the left, pointing to a patch of clover.

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The animal scurried along, almost concealed by the field, only its large ears visible. Then it swerved across a deep furrow, stopped, started off again at top speed, changed its course, stopped anew, uneasy, spying out every danger, and undecided as to the route it should take. Suddenly it began to run, with great bounds from its hind legs, disappearing finally in a large patch of beet-root. All the men had wakened up to watch the animal's movements.

René Lemanoir then exclaimed:

"We are not at all gallant this morning," and looking at his neighbor, the little Baronne de Sérennes, who was struggling with drowsiness, he said to her in a subdued voice: "You are thinking of your husband, Baronne. Reassure yourself; he will not return before Saturday, so you still have four days."

She replied, with a sleepy smile:

"How silly you are." Then, shaking off her torpor, she added: "Now, let somebody say something that will make us all laugh. You, Monsieur Chenal, who have the reputation of possessing a larger fortune than the Duc de Richelieu, tell us a love story in which you have been involved, anything you like."

Léon Chenal, an old painter, who had once been very handsome, very strong, who was very proud of his physique and very popular, took his long white beard in his hand and smiled; then, after a few moments' reflection, he became suddenly grave.

"Ladies, it will not be an amusing tale; for I

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am going to relate to you the most lamentable love affair of my life, and I sincerely hope that none of my friends may ever inspire a similar passion."

### I

"At that time I was twenty-five years old, and I was daubing along the coast of Normandy. I call 'daubing' to wander about, with a knapsack on one's back, from inn to inn, under the pretext of making studies and sketches from nature. I know nothing more enjoyable than that happy-go-lucky wandering life, in which you are perfectly free, without shackles of any kind, without a care, without a single preoccupation, without even a thought of to-morrow. You go in any direction you please, without any guide save your fancy, without any counselor save what pleases your eyes. You pull up, because a running brook seduces you, or because you are attracted, in front of an inn, by the smell of fried potatoes. Sometimes it is the perfume of clematis which decides you in your choice, or the glance of the servant at an inn. Do not despise these rustic affections. These girls have souls as well as bodies, firm cheeks and fresh lips; while their hearty and willing kisses have the flavor of wild fruit. Love always has its savour, come whence it may. A heart that beats when you make your appearance, an eye that weeps when you go away, these are things so rare, so sweet, so precious, that they must never be despised.

"I have had rendezvous in ditches full of prim-

## MISS HARRIET

roses, behind the stable in which the cattle slept, and among the straw in garrets still warm from the heat of the day. I have memories of course grey linen on supple strong bodies, and of hearty, fresh, free kisses, more delicate, in their sincere brutality, than the subtle attractions of charming and distinguished women.

"But what you love most in these pilgrimages of adventure are the country, the woods, the sunrises, the twilights, the light of the moon. For the painter these are honeymoon trips with Nature. You are alone with her in a long, quiet rendezvous. You go to bed in the fields amid marguerites and wild poppies, and, with eyes wide open, beneath the bright sunset, you watch in the distance the little village, with its pointed clock-tower, which sounds the hour of noon.

"You sit down by the side of a spring which gushes out from the foot of an oak, amid a covering of tall, fragile weeds, glistening with life. You go down on your knees, bend forward, and drink the cold and pellucid water, wetting your mustache and nose; you drink it with a physical pleasure, as though you were kissing the spring, lip to lip. Sometimes, when you encounter a deep hole, along the course of these tiny brooks, you plunge into it, quite naked, and on your skin, from head to foot, like an icy and delicious caress, you feel the lovely and gentle quivering of the current.

"You are gay on the hills, melancholy on the verge of pools, exalted when the sun is drowned in an ocean of blood-red shadows, and when it casts on the rivers its red reflection. And at night,

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under the moon, as it passes across the roof of heaven, you think of things, singular things, which would never have occurred to your mind under the brilliant light of day.

"So, in wandering through the same country where we are this year, I came to the little village of Bénouville, on the rocky coast, between Yport and Étretat. I came from Fécamp, following the coast, a high coast, perpendicular as a wall, with projecting and rugged rocks falling sheer down into the sea. I had walked since morning on the close-clipped grass, as smooth and as yielding as a carpet, which grows along the edge of the cliff, fanned by the salt breezes of the ocean. Singing lustily, I walked with long strides, looking sometimes at the slow and lazy flight of a gull, with its short, white wings, sailing in the blue heavens, sometimes at the green sea, or at the brown sails of a fishing bark. In short, I had passed a happy day, a day of liberty and freedom from care.

"I was shown a little farmhouse, where travellers were put up, a kind of inn, kept by a peasant, which stood in the centre of a Norman court, surrounded by a double row of beeches.

"Leaving the court, I reached the hamlet, which was shut in by great trees, and I presented myself at the house of Mother Lecacheur.

"She was an old country woman, wrinkled and austere, who always seemed to receive customers reluctantly, with a kind of contempt.

"It was the month of May: the flowering apple-trees covered the court with a roof of perfumed flowers, with a whirling shower of blossoms which

## MISS HARRIET

rained unceasingly both upon the people and upon the grass.

"I said:

"Well, Madame Lecacheur, have you a room for me?"

"Astonished to find that I knew her name, she answered:

"That depends; everything is let; but, all the same, there will be no harm in looking."

"In five minutes we had come to an agreement, and I deposited my bag upon the earthen floor of a rustic room, furnished with a bed, two chairs, a table, and a washstand. The room opened into the large and smoky kitchen, where the lodgers took their meals with the people of the farm and with the woman herself, who was a widow.

"I washed my hands, after which I went out. The old woman was making a chicken fricassee for dinner in a large fireplace, in which hung the stew-pot, black with smoke.

"You have visitors, then, at the present time?" said I to her.

"She answered in an offended tone of voice:

"I have a lady, an English lady, of a certain age. She is occupying the other room."

"For an extra five sous a day, I obtained the privilege of dining out in the court when the weather was fine.

"My place was then set in front of the door, and I commenced to gnaw with hunger the lean limbs of the Normandy chicken, to drink the clear cider, and to munch the hunk of white bread, which, though four days old, was excellent.

## MISS HARRIET

"Suddenly, the wooden barrier which opened on to the highway was opened, and a strange person directed her steps toward the house. She was very thin, very tall, enveloped in a Scotch shawl with red checks. You would have believed that she had no arms, if you had not seen a long hand appear just above the hips, holding a white tourist's umbrella. The face of a mummy, surrounded with sausage rolls of plaited grey hair, which bounded at every step she took, made me think, I know not why, of a pickled herring adorned with curling papers. Lowering her eyes, she passed quickly in front of me, and entered the house.

"This singular apparition made me curious. She undoubtedly was my neighbour, the aged English lady of whom our hostess had spoken.

"I did not see her again that day. The next day, when I had begun to paint at the end of that beautiful valley, which, you know, extends as far as Étretat, lifting my eyes suddenly, I perceived something singularly attired standing on the crest of the declivity; it looked like a pole decked out with flags. It was she. On seeing me, she suddenly disappeared. I returned to the house at midday for lunch, and took my seat at the common table, so as to make the acquaintance of this eccentric old creature. But she did not respond to my polite advances, was insensible even to my little attentions. I poured water out for her with great alacrity, I passed her the dishes with great eagerness. A slight, almost imperceptible movement of the head, and an English word, murmured so low that I did not understand it, were her only acknowledgments.

## MISS HARRIET

"I ceased taking any notice of her, although she had disturbed my thoughts. At the end of three days, I knew as much about her as did Madame Lecacheur herself.

"She was called Miss Harriet. Seeking out a secluded village in which to pass the summer, she had been attracted to Bénouville, some six months before, and did not seem disposed to leave it. She never spoke at table, ate rapidly, reading all the while a small book of Protestant propaganda. She gave a copy of it to everybody. The curé himself had received no less than four copies, at the hands of an urchin to whom she had paid two sous' commission. She said sometimes to our hostess, abruptly, without the slightest preliminary leading up to this declaration:

"‘I love the Saviour above all; I worship him in all creation; I adore him in all nature; I carry him always in my heart.’

"And she would immediately present the old woman with one of her brochures which were destined to convert the universe.

"In the village she was not liked. In fact, the schoolmaster had declared that she was an atheist, and a kind of stigma attached to her. The curé, who had been consulted by Madame Lecacheur, responded:

"‘She is a heretic, but God does not wish the death of the sinner, and I believe her to be a person of pure morals.’

"These words, ‘atheist,’ ‘heretic,’ words which no one can precisely define, threw doubts into some minds. It was asserted, however, that this English-

woman was rich, and that she had passed her life in travelling through every country in the world, because her family had thrown her off. Why had her family thrown her off? Because of her natural impiety?

"She was, in fact, one of those people of exalted principles, one of those obstinate puritans of whom England produces so many, one of those good and insupportable old women who haunt the *tables d'hôte* of every hotel in Europe, who spoil Italy, poison Switzerland, render the charming cities of the Mediterranean uninhabitable, carry everywhere their fantastic manias, their petrified vestal manners, their indescribable toilettes, and a certain odour of india-rubber, which makes one believe that at night they slip themselves into a case of that material. When I meet one of these people in a hotel, I flee like the birds when they see a scarecrow in a field.

"This woman, however, appeared so singular that she did not displease me.

"Madame Lecacheur, hostile by instinct to everything that was not rural, felt in her narrow soul a kind of hatred for the ecstatic extravagances of the old girl. She had found a phrase by which to describe her, I know not how, but a phrase assuredly contemptuous, which had sprung to her lips, invented probably by some confused and mysterious travail of soul. She said: 'That woman is a demoniac.' This phrase, as uttered by that austere and sentimental creature, seemed to me irresistibly comic. I, myself, never called her now anything else but 'the demoniac,' feeling a singular pleasure in pronouncing this word on seeing her.

"I would ask Mother Lecacheur: 'Well, what is our demoniac doing to-day?' To which my rustic friend would respond, with an air of having been scandalized:

"'What do you think, sir? She picked up a toad which had its leg battered, carried it to her room, put it in her washstand, and dressed its wound as if it were a human. If that is not profanation, I should like to know what is!'

"On another occasion, when walking along the shore, she had bought a large fish which had just been caught, simply to throw it back into the sea again. The sailor, from whom she had bought it, though paid handsomely, was greatly provoked at this act — more exasperated, indeed, than if she had put her hand into his pocket and taken his money. For a whole month he could not speak of the circumstance without getting into a fury and denouncing it as an outrage. Oh yes! She was indeed a demoniac, this Miss Harriet, and Mother Lecacheur must have had an inspiration of genius in thus christening her.

"The stable-boy, who was called Sapeur, because he had served in Africa in his youth, entertained other aversions. He said, with a knowing air: 'She is an old hag who has had her day.' If the poor woman had but known.

"Céleste, the little servant, did not like waiting on her, but I was never able to understand why. Probably her only reason was that she was a stranger, of another race, of a different tongue, and of another religion. She was a demoniac in brief!

"She passed her time wandering about the coun-

### MISS HARRIET

try, adoring and searching for God in nature. I found her one evening on her knees in a cluster of bushes. Having discovered something red through the leaves, I brushed aside the branches, and Miss Harriet at once rose to her feet, confused at having been found thus, looking at me with eyes as frightened as those of an owl surprised in open day.

“Sometimes, when I was working among the rocks, I would suddenly see her on the edge of the cliff, standing like a semaphore signal. She gazed passionately at the vast sea, glittering in the sunlight, and the boundless sky empurpled with fire. Sometimes I would distinguish her at the bottom of a valley, walking quickly, with her elastic English step; and I would go towards her, mysteriously attracted, simply to see her visionary expression, her dried-up, ineffable features, full of an inward and profound happiness.

“Often I would encounter her in the corner of a field sitting on the grass, under the shadow of an apple-tree, with her little Bible lying open on her knee, while she looked meditatively into the distance.

“I could no longer tear myself away from that quiet country neighbourhood, bound to it as I was by a thousand links of love for its soft and sweeping landscapes. I was happy at this farm, which was out of the world, far removed from everything, but in close proximity to the soil, the good, healthy, beautiful green soil, which we ourselves shall fertilise with our bodies some day. And, I must confess, there was perhaps a certain amount of curiosity which kept me at Mother Lecacheur’s.

## MISS HARRIET

I wished to become acquainted a little with this strange Miss Harriet, and to learn what passes in the solitary souls of those wandering old, English dames.

### II

"We became acquainted in a rather singular manner. I had just finished a study which seemed to me rather striking. It must have been, for it was sold for ten thousand francs, fifteen years later. It was as simple, however, as twice two make four, and had nothing to do with academic rules. The whole of the right side of my canvas represented a rock, an enormous jagged rock, covered with seawrack, brown, yellow, and red, across which the sun poured like a stream of oil. The light fell upon the stone, and gilded it as if with fire, but the sun itself was behind me and could not be seen. That was all. A foreground dazzling with light, blazing, superb.

"On the left was the sea, not the blue sea, the slate-coloured sea, but a sea of jade, greenish, milky, and hard under the overcast sky.

"I was so pleased with my work that I danced as I carried it back to the inn. I wished that the whole world could have seen it at one and the same moment. I can remember that I showed it to a cow, which was browsing by the wayside, exclaiming, at the same time: 'Look at that, my old beauty; you will not often see its like again.'

"When I had reached the front of the house, I immediately called out to Mother Lecacheur, bawling with all my might:

## MISS HARRIET

“Hello, there, Landlady! Come here and look at this.”

“The woman came and looked at my work with stupid eyes, which distinguished nothing, and did not even recognize whether the picture represented an ox or a house.

“Miss Harriet was coming into the house, and she passed behind me just at the moment when, holding out my canvas at arm’s length, I was exhibiting it to the female innkeeper. The ‘demoniac’ could not help but see it, for I took care to exhibit the thing in such a way that it could not escape her notice. She stopped abruptly and stood motionless, stupefied. It was her rock which was depicted, the one which she usually climbed to dream away her time undisturbed.

“She uttered a British ‘Oh,’ which was at once so accentuated and so flattering, that I turned round to her, smiling, and said:

“‘This is my latest study, Mademoiselle.’

“She murmured ecstatically, comically, and tenderly:

“‘Oh! Monsieur, you understand nature in a most thrilling way!’

“I coloured up, of course, and was more excited by that compliment than if it had come from a queen. I was seduced, conquered, vanquished. I could have embraced her — upon my honour.

“I took my seat at the table beside her, as I had always done. For the first time, she spoke, drawing out in a loud voice:

“‘Oh! I love nature so much.’

“I offered her some bread, some water, some

wine. She now accepted these with the vacant smile of a mummy. I then began to converse with her about the scenery.

"After the meal, we rose from the table together and walked leisurely across the court; then, attracted by the fiery glow which the setting sun cast over the surface of the sea, I opened the outside gate which faced in the direction of the cliff, and we walked on side by side, as satisfied as any two persons could be who have just learned to understand and penetrate each other's motives and feelings.

"It was a misty, relaxing evening, one of those enjoyable evenings which impart happiness to mind and body alike. All is joy, all is charm. The luscious and balmy air, loaded with the perfume of grass, with the perfumes of grass-wrack, with the odour of the wild flowers, caresses the nostrils with its wild perfume, the palate with its salty savour, the soul with a penetrating sweetness. We were going to the brink of the abyss which overlooked the vast sea, which rolled its little waves below us, at a distance of less than a hundred metres.

"We drank, with open mouth and expanded chest, that fresh breeze from the ocean which glides slowly over the skin, salted as it is by long contact with the waves.

"Wrapped in her plaid shawl, with a look of inspiration as she faced the breeze, the English woman gazed fixedly at the great sun ball as it descended toward the horizon. Far off in the distance a three-master in full sail was outlined on the blood-red sky and a steamship, somewhat nearer, passed

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along, leaving behind it a trail of smoke on the horizon. The red sun globe sank slowly lower and lower and presently touched the water just behind the motionless vessel, which, in its dazzling effulgence, looked as though framed in a flame of fire. We saw it plunge, grow smaller and disappear, swallowed up by the ocean.

"Miss Harriet gazed in rapture at the last gleams of the dying day. She seemed longing to embrace the sky, the sea, the whole landscape.

"She murmured: 'Ah! I love — I love——' I saw a tear in her eye. She continued: 'I wish I were a little bird, so that I could mount up into the firmament.'

"She remained standing as I had often before seen her, perched on the cliff, her face as red as her shawl. I should have liked to have sketched her in my album. It would have been a caricature of ecstasy.

"I turned away so as not to laugh.

"I then spoke to her of painting as I would have done to a fellow artist, using the technical terms common among the devotees of the profession. She listened attentively, eagerly seeking to divine the meaning of the terms, so as to understand my thoughts. From time to time she would exclaim: 'Oh! I understand, I understand. It is very interesting.'

"We returned home.

"The next day, on seeing me, she approached me, cordially holding out her hand; and we at once became firm friends.

"She was a good creature who had a kind of soul

## MISS HARRIET

on springs, which became enthusiastic at a bound. She lacked equilibrium, like all women who are spinsters at the age of fifty. She seemed to be preserved in vinegary innocence, though her heart still retained something of youth and of girlish effervescence. She loved both nature and animals with a fervent ardour, a love like old wine, mellow through age, with a sensual love that she had never bestowed on men.

"One thing is certain: a bitch feeding her pups, a mare roaming in a meadow with a foal at its side, a bird's nest full of young ones, squeaking, with their open mouths and enormous heads, and no feathers, made her quiver with the most violent emotion.

"Poor solitary beings! Sad wanderers from *table d'hôte* to *table d'hôte*, poor beings, ridiculous and lamentable, I love you ever since I became acquainted with Miss Harriet!

"I soon discovered that she had something she would like to tell me, but dared not, and I was amused at her timidity. When I started out in the morning with my box on my back, she would accompany me to the end of the village, silent, but evidently struggling inwardly to find words with which to begin a conversation. Then she would leave me abruptly, and, with jaunty step, walk away quickly.

"One day, however, she plucked up courage:

"'I would like to see how you paint pictures? Will you show me? I have been very curious.'

"And she coloured up as though she had given utterance to words extremely audacious.

## MISS HARRIET

"I conducted her to the bottom of the Petit-Val, where I had commenced a large picture.

"She remained standing near me, following all my gestures with concentrated attention. Then, suddenly, fearing, perhaps, that she was disturbing me, she said to me: 'Thank you,' and walked away.

"But in a short time she became more familiar, and accompanied me every day, with visible pleasure. She carried her folding stool under her arm, would not consent to my carrying it, and she sat by my side. She would remain there for hours immovable and mute, following with her eye the point of my brush in its every movement. When I would obtain, by a large splash of colour spread on with a knife, a striking and unexpected effect, she would, in spite of herself, give vent to a half-suppressed 'Oh!' of astonishment, of joy, of admiration. She had the most tender respect for my canvases, an almost religious respect for that human reproduction of a part of nature's divine work. My studies appeared to her as a species of holy pictures, and sometimes she spoke to me of God, with the idea of converting me.

"Oh! He was a queer creature, this God of hers. He was a sort of village philosopher without any great resources, and without great power; for she always pictured him to herself as a being in despair over injustices committed under his eyes, as if he were helpless to prevent them.

"She was, however, on excellent terms with him, affecting even to be the confidante of his secrets and of his whims. She said: 'God wills, or God does

not will,' just like a sergeant announcing to a recruit: 'The colonel has commanded.'

"At the bottom of her heart she deplored my ignorance of the intentions of the Eternal, which she strove, nay, felt herself compelled, to impart to me.

"Every day, I found in my pockets, in my hat when I lifted it from the ground, in my box of colours, in my polished shoes, standing in the mornings in front of my door, those little pious brochures, which she, no doubt, received directly from Paradise.

"I treated her as one would an old friend, with unaffected cordiality. But I soon perceived that she had changed somewhat in her manner, though, for a while, I paid little attention to it.

"When I was painting, whether in my valley or in some country lane, I would see her suddenly appear with her rapid, springy walk. She would then sit down abruptly, out of breath, as though she had been running or were overcome by some profound emotion. Her face would be red, that English red which is denied to the people of all other countries; then, without any reason, she would turn ashy pale and seem about to faint away. Gradually, however, her natural colour would return and she would begin to speak.

"Then, without warning, she would break off in the middle of a sentence, spring up from her seat and walk away so rapidly and so strangely that I was at my wits' ends to discover whether I had done or said anything to displease or wound her.

"I finally came to the conclusion that those were her normal manners, somewhat modified no doubt

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in my honour during the first days of our acquaintance.

"When she returned to the farm, after walking for hours on the windy coast, her long curls often hung straight down, as if their springs had been broken. This had hitherto seldom given her any concern, and she would come to dinner without embarrassment all dishevelled by her sister, the breeze.

"But now she would go up to her room in order to adjust what I called her glass lamps. When I would say to her, with familiar gallantry, which, however, always offended her: 'You are as beautiful as a planet to-day, Miss Harriet,' a little blood would immediately mount into her cheeks, the blood of a young maiden, the blood of sweet fifteen.

"Then she became quite savage, and ceased coming to watch me paint. But I always thought:

"'This is only a fit of temper. It will pass.'

"But it did not always pass away. When I spoke to her now, she would answer me, either with an air of affected indifference, or in sullen anger; and she became by turns rude, impatient, and nervous. I never saw her except at meals, and we spoke but little. I concluded, at length, that I must have offended her in something: and, accordingly, I said to her one evening:

"'Miss Harriet, why is it that you do not act towards me as formerly? What have I done to displease you? You are causing me much pain!'

"She responded, in an angry tone, which was very funny: 'I am always the same to you as

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formerly. It is not true, not true,' and she ran upstairs and shut herself up in her room.

"At times she would look upon me with strange eyes. Since that time I have often said to myself that those condemned to death must look thus when informed that their last day has come. In her eye there lurked a species of madness, an insanity at once mystical and violent — something more, a fever, an exasperated desire, impatient, unrealized and unrealizable!

"It seemed to me that there was also going on within her a combat, in which her heart struggled against an unknown force that she wished to overcome — perhaps, even, something else. But what could I know? What could I know?

### III

"It was indeed a singular revelation.

"For some time I had commenced to work, as soon as daylight appeared, on a picture the subject of which was as follows:

"A deep ravine, enclosed, surmounted by two thickets of trees and vines, extended into the distance and was lost, submerged in that milky vapour, in that cloud like cotton down that sometimes floats over valleys at daybreak. And at the extreme end of that heavy, transparent fog one saw, or, rather, surmised, that a couple of human beings were approaching, a human couple, a youth and a maiden, their arms interlaced, embracing each other, their heads inclined toward each other, their lips meeting.

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"A first ray of the sun, glistening through the branches, pierced that fog of the dawn, illuminated it with a rosy reflection just behind the rustic lovers, framing their vague shadows in a silvery background. It was well done; yes, indeed, well done.

"I was working on the declivity which led to the Valley of Étretat. On this particular morning I had, by chance, the sort of floating vapor which I needed. Suddenly something rose up in front of me like a phantom; it was Miss Harriet. On seeing me she was about to flee. But I called after her, saying: 'Come here, come here, mademoiselle. I have a nice little picture for you.'

"She came forward, though with seeming reluctance. I handed her my sketch. She said nothing, but stood for a long time motionless, looking at it. Suddenly she burst into tears. She wept spasmodically, like men who have been struggling hard against shedding tears, but who can do so no longer, and abandon themselves to grief, though unwillingly. I got up, trembling, moved myself by the sight of a sorrow I did not understand, and I took her by the hand with a gesture of brusque affection, the real impulse of a Frenchman who acts more rapidly than he thinks.

"She let her hands rest in mine for a few seconds, and I felt them quiver, as if her whole nervous system were on the rack. Then she withdrew her hands abruptly, or, rather, tore them out of mine.

"I recognized that shiver as soon as I had felt it; I was deceived in nothing. Ah! the love thrill of a woman, whether she is fifteen or fifty years of age, whether she is of the people or in society, goes

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so straight to my heart that I never had any difficulty in understanding it!

"Her whole frail being trembled, vibrated, yielded. I knew it. She walked away before I had time to say a word, leaving me as surprised as if I had witnessed a miracle, and as troubled as if I had committed a crime.

"I did not go in to breakfast. I took a walk on the edge of the cliff, feeling that I could just as soon weep as laugh, looking on the adventure as both comic and deplorable, and my position as ridiculous, believing her unhappy enough to go mad.

"I asked myself what I ought to do. I judged I had better take leave of the place and almost immediately my resolution was formed.

"Somewhat sad and perplexed, I wandered about until dinner time, and entered the farmhouse just when the soup had been served.

"I sat down at the table as usual. Miss Harriet was there, eating away solemnly, without speaking to any one, without even lifting her eyes. Her manner and expression were, however, the same as usual.

"I waited patiently till the meal had been finished, when, turning toward the landlady, I said: 'Well, Madame Lecacheur, it will not be long now before I shall have to take my leave of you.'

"The good woman, at once surprised and troubled, replied in her drawling voice: 'My dear sir, what is it you say? You are going to leave us after I have become so accustomed to you?'

"I glanced at Miss Harriet out of the corner of my eye. Her countenance did not change in the least. But Céleste, the little servant, looked up at

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me. She was a fat girl, of about eighteen years of age, rosy, fresh, as strong as a horse, and possessing the rare attribute of cleanliness. I had kissed her at odd times in out-of-the-way corners, after the manner of travellers — nothing more.

“The dinner being at length over, I went to smoke my pipe under the apple-trees, walking up and down from one end of the enclosure to the other. All the reflections which I had made during the day, the strange discovery of the morning, that passionate and grotesque attachment for me, the recollections which that revelation had suddenly called up, recollections at once charming and perplexing, perhaps also that look which the servant had cast on me at the announcement of my departure — all these things, mixed up and combined, put me now in a reckless humour, gave me a tickling sensation of kisses on the lips, and in my veins a something which urged me on to commit some folly.

“Night was coming on, casting its dark shadows under the trees, when I descried Céleste, who had gone to fasten up the poultry yard at the other end of the enclosure. I darted towards her, running so noiselessly that she heard nothing, and as she got up from closing the small trapdoor by which the chickens got in and out, I clasped her in my arms and rained on her coarse, fat face a shower of kisses. She struggled, laughing all the time, as she was accustomed to do in such circumstances. Why did I suddenly loose my grip of her? Why did I at once experience a shock? What was it that I heard behind me?

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"It was Miss Harriet, who had come upon us, who had seen us and who stood in front of us motionless as a spectre. Then she disappeared in the darkness.

"I was ashamed, embarrassed, more sorry at having been thus surprised by her than if she had caught me committing some criminal act.

"I slept badly that night. I was completely unnerved and haunted by sad thoughts. I seemed to hear loud weeping, but in this I was no doubt deceived. Moreover, I thought several times that I heard some one walking up and down in the house and opening the hall door.

"Towards morning I was overcome by fatigue and fell asleep. I got up late and did not go downstairs until the late breakfast, being still in a bewildered state, not knowing what kind of expression to put on.

"No one had seen Miss Harriet. We waited for her at table, but she did not appear. At length, Mother Lechacheur went to her room. The English-woman had gone out. She must have set out at break of day, as she was wont to do, in order to see the sun rise.

"Nobody seemed astonished at this and we began to eat in silence.

"The weather was hot, very hot, one of those still, sultry days when not a leaf stirs. The table had been placed out of doors, under an apple-tree; and from time to time Sapeur had gone to the cellar to draw a jug of cider, everybody was so thirsty. Céleste brought the dishes from the kitchen, a ragout of mutton with potatoes, a cold rabbit, and a

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salad. Afterwards she placed before us a dish of cherries, the first of the season.

"As I wanted to wash and freshen these, I begged the servant to go and bring a pitcher of cold water.

"In about five minutes she returned, declaring that the well was dry. She had lowered the pitcher to the full extent of the cord, and had touched the bottom, but on drawing the pitcher up again, it was empty. Mother Lecacheur, anxious to examine the thing for herself, went and looked down the hole. She returned announcing that one could see clearly something in the well, something altogether unusual. Doubtless a neighbour had thrown some bundles of straw down, out of spite.

"I wished also to look down the well, hoping to see better, and I leaned over the brink. I perceived, indistinctly, a white object. What could it be? I then conceived the idea of lowering a lantern at the end of a cord. The yellow flame danced on the stone walls, and gradually sank deeper. All four of us were leaning over the opening, Sapeur and Céleste having now joined us. The lantern rested on a black and white, indistinct mass, singular, incomprehensible. Sapeur exclaimed:

"'It is a horse. I see the hoofs. It must have escaped from the meadow, during the night, and fallen in headlong.'

"But, suddenly, a cold shiver attacked my spine, I first recognized a foot, then a clothed limb; the body was entire, but the other limb had disappeared under the water.

"I groaned and trembled so violently that the

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light of the lamp danced hither and thither over the object, discovering a slipper.

"‘It is a woman! who — who — is down there. It is Miss Harriet.’

“Sapeur alone did not manifest horror. He had witnessed worse things in Africa.

“Mother Lecacheur and Céleste began to scream and to shriek, and ran away.

“But it was necessary to recover the corpse of the dead woman. I attached the boy securely by the loins, then I lowered him slowly, by means of the pulley, and watched him disappear in the darkness. In his hands he had a lantern, and another rope. Soon I recognized his voice, which seemed to come from the centre of the earth, crying:

“‘Stop.’

“I then saw him fish something out of the water. It was the other limb. He bound the two feet together, and shouted anew:

“‘Haul up.’

“I commenced to wind him up, but I felt as if my arms were broken, my muscles relaxed, and I was in terror lest I should let the boy fall to the bottom. When his head appeared over the brink, I asked:

“‘Well,’ as if I expected he had a message from the woman lying at the bottom.

“We both got on to the stone slab at the edge of the well, and, face to face, hoisted the body.

“Mother Lecacheur and Céleste watched us from a distance, concealed behind the wall of the house. When they saw, issuing from the well, the black

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slippers and white stockings of the drowned person, they disappeared.

“Sapeur seized the ankles, and we pulled up the poor chaste woman, in the most immodest posture. The head was in a shocking state, bruised and black; and the long, grey hair, hanging down, out of curl for ever, was muddy and dripping with water.

“‘In the name of all that is holy, how thin she is!’ exclaimed Sapeur, in a contemptuous tone.

“We carried her into the room, and as the women did not put in an appearance, I, with the assistance of the lad, dressed the corpse for burial.

“I washed her disfigured face. By the touch of my hand an eye was slightly opened; it seemed to scan me with that pale stare, with that cold, that terrible look which corpses have, a look which seems to come from the beyond. I plaited up, as well as I could, her dishevelled hair, and I arranged on her forehead a novel and singular coiffure. Then I took off her dripping wet garments, baring, not without a feeling of shame, as though I had been guilty of some profanation, her shoulders and her chest, and her long arms, slim as the twigs of branches.

“I next went to fetch some flowers, poppies, corn-flowers, marguerites, and fresh, sweet smelling grass, with which to strew her funeral couch.

“Being the only person near her, it was necessary for me to fulfil the usual formalities. In a letter found in her pocket, written at the last moment, she asked that her body be buried in the village in which she had passed the last days of her life.

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A frightful thought then oppressed my heart. Was it not on my account that she wished to be laid at rest in this place?

“Towards evening, all the female gossips of the locality came to view the remains of the deceased; but I would not allow a single person to enter; I wanted to be alone; and I watched by the corpse the whole night.

“By the light of the candles, I looked at the body of this miserable woman, wholly unknown, who had died so lamentably and so far away from home. Had she left no friends, no relatives behind her? What had her infancy been? What had been her life? Whence had she come, all alone, a wanderer, like a dog driven from home? What secrets of suffering and of despair were sealed up in that disagreeable body, like a shameful defect, concealed all her life beneath that ridiculous exterior, which had driven away from her all affection and all love?

“How many unhappy beings there are! I felt that upon that human creature weighed the eternal injustice of implacable nature! Life was over with her, without her ever having experienced, perhaps, that which sustains the most miserable of us all — to wit, the hope of being once loved! Otherwise, why should she thus have concealed herself, have fled from others? Why did she love everything so tenderly and so passionately, everything living that was not a man?

“I understood, also, why she believed in a God, and hoped for compensation from him for the miseries she had endured. She had now begun

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to decompose, and to become, in turn, a plant. She would blossom in the sun, and be eaten up by the cattle, carried away in seed by the birds, and as flesh by the beasts, again to become human flesh. But that which is called the soul had been extinguished at the bottom of the dark well. She suffered no longer. She had changed her life for that of others yet to be born.

"Hours passed away in this silent and sinister communion with the dead. A pale light announced the dawn of a new day, and a bright ray glistened on the bed, shedding a dash of fire on the bed-clothes and on her hands. This was the hour she had so much loved, when the waking birds began to sing in the trees.

"I opened the window wide, I drew back the curtains, so that the whole heavens might look in upon us. Then bending toward the glassy corpse, I took in my hands the mutilated head, and slowly, without terror or disgust, imprinted a long, long kiss upon those lips which had never before received the salute of love."

Léon Chenal was silent. The women wept. We heard the Comte d'Etraille on the box seat blow his nose several times in succession. The coachman alone had gone to sleep. The horses, no longer feeling the sting of the whip, had slackened their pace and were dragging us slowly along. And the brake hardly moved at all, having become suddenly heavy, as if laden with sorrow.

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THE four glasses which were standing in front of the diners were still nearly half full, which is a sign, as a general rule, that the guests are quite so. They were beginning to speak without waiting for an answer; no one took any notice of anything except what was going on inside him; voices grew louder, gestures more animated, eyes brighter.

It was a bachelors' dinner of confirmed old celibates. They had instituted this regular banquet twenty years before, christening it "The Celibate," and at the time there were fourteen of them, all fully determined never to marry. Now there were only four of them left; three were dead and the other seven were married.

These four stuck firmly to it, and, as far as lay in their power, they scrupulously observed the rules which had been laid down at the beginning of their curious association. They had sworn, hand-in-hand, to turn aside every woman they could from the right path, and their friends' wives for choice, and more especially those of their most intimate friends. For this reason, as soon as any of them left the society, in order to set up in domestic life for himself, he took care to quarrel definitely with all his former companions.

Besides this, they were pledged at every dinner

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to relate most minutely their last adventures, which had given rise to this familiar phrase among them: "To lie like an old bachelor."

They professed, moreover, the most profound contempt for woman, whom they talked of as an animal made solely for their pleasure. Every moment they quoted Schopenhauer, who was their god, and his well-known essay "On Women"; they wished that harems and towers might be reintroduced, and had the ancient maxim: "*Mulier, perpetuus infans,*" woven into their table-linen, and below it, the line of Alfred de Vigny: "*La femme, enfant malade et douze fois impure.*" So that by dint of despising women they lived only for them, while all their efforts and all their desires were directed toward them. Those of them who had married called them old fops, made fun of them, and — feared them.

When they began to feel the exhilarating effects of the champagne, the tales of their old bachelor experiences began.

On the day in question, these old fellows, for they were old by this time, and the older they grew the more extraordinary strokes of luck in the way of love affairs they had to relate, were quite talkative. For the last month, according to their own accounts, each of them had seduced at least one woman a day. And what women! the youngest, the noblest, the richest, and the most beautiful!

After they had finished their stories, one of them, he who had spoken first and had therefore been obliged to listen to all the others, rose and said:

"Now that we have finished drawing the longbow, I should like to tell you, not my last, but my

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first adventure, — I mean the first adventure of my life, my first fall, — for it is a moral fall after all, in the arms of Venus. Oh! I am not going to tell you my first — what shall I call it? — my first appearance; certainly not. The leap over the first ditch (I am speaking figuratively) has nothing interesting about it. It is generally rather a muddy one, and one picks oneself up rather abashed, with one charming illusion the less, with a vague feeling of disappointment and sadness. That realization of love the first time one experiences it is rather repugnant; we had dreamed of it as being so different, so delicate, so refined. It leaves a physical and moral sense of disgust behind it, just as when one has happened to put one's hand on a toad. You may rub your hand as hard as you like, but the moral feeling remains.

"Yes! one very soon gets quite used to it; there is no doubt about that. For my part, however, I am very sorry it was not in my power to give the Creator the benefit of my advice when He was arranging these little matters. I wonder what *I* should have done? I am not quite sure, but I think, with the English savant, John Stuart Mill, I should have managed differently; I should have found some more convenient and more poetical combination, yes — more poetical.

"I really think that the Creator showed Himself to be too naturalistic — too — what shall I say? His invention lacks poetry.

"However, what I am going to tell you is about my first woman of the world, the first woman in society I ever made love to. I beg your pardon, I

ought to say the first woman of the world that ever triumphed over me. For at first it is *we* who allow ourselves to be taken, while, later on — it is the . . . . same thing!

“She was a friend of my mother, a charming woman in every way. When such women are chaste, it is generally from sheer stupidity, and when they are in love they are furiously so. And then — we are accused of corrupting them! Yes, yes, of course! With them it is always the rabbit that begins and never the sportsman. I know all about it; they don’t seem to lure us, but they do it all the same, and do what they like with us, without it being noticed, and then they actually accuse us of having ruined them, dishonoured them, degraded them, and all the rest of it.

“The woman in question certainly had a great desire to be ‘degraded’ by me. She may have been about thirty-five, while I was scarcely two-and-twenty. I no more thought of seducing her than I did of turning Trappist. Well, one day when I was calling on her, and while I was looking at her dress with considerable astonishment, for she had on a morning wrapper which was open as wide as a church-door when the bells are ringing for mass, she took my hand and squeezed it — squeezed it, you know, as they will do at such moments — and said, with a deep sigh, one of those sighs, you know, which come right from the bottom of the chest: ‘Oh! don’t look at me like that, child!’ I got as red as a tomato, and felt more nervous than usual, naturally. I was very much inclined to bolt, but she held my hand tightly, and putting it on her

well-developed bust, she said: ‘Just feel how my heart beats!’ Of course it was beating, and I began to understand what was the matter, but I did not know what to do. I have changed considerably since then.

“As I remained standing there, with one hand on the soft covering of her heart, while I held my hat in the other, and continued to look at her with a confused, silly smile — a timid frightened smile — she suddenly drew back, and said in an irritated voice:

“‘Young man, what are you doing? You are indecent and badly brought up.’

“You may be sure I took my hand away quickly, stopped smiling, and stammering out some excuse, got up and took my leave as if I had lost my head.

“But I was caught, and dreamed of her. I thought her charming, adorable; I fancied that I loved her, that I had always loved her, and I determined to see her again. I decided to be enterprising, to be more than that even.

“When I saw her again she gave me a shy smile. Oh, how that little smile upset me! And she shook hands with a long, significant pressure.

“From that day it seems that I made love to her; at least, she declared afterward that I had ruined her, captured her, dishonoured her, with rare Machiavellism, with consummate cleverness, with the calculations of a mathematician, and the cunning of an Apache Indian.

“But one thing troubled me strangely: where was my triumph to be accomplished? I lived with

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my family, and on this point my family was most particular. I was not bold enough to venture into a hotel in broad daylight with a woman on my arm, and I did not know whom to ask for advice.

"Now, my fair friend had often said in joke that every young man ought to have a room for himself somewhere or other from home. We lived in Paris, and this was a sort of inspiration. I took a room, and she came. She came one day in November; I should have liked to put off her visit because I had no fire, and I had no fire because the chimney smoked. The very evening before I had spoken to my landlord, a retired shopkeeper, about it, and he had promised that he would come himself with the chimney-expert in a day or two to see what could be done.

"As soon as she came in, I said:

"'There is no fire because my chimney smokes.'

"She did not even appear to hear me, but stammered: 'That does not matter, I have plenty of fire'; and when I looked surprised, she stopped short in confusion, and went on: 'I don't know what I am saying; I am mad. I have lost my head. Oh! what am I doing? Why did I come? How unhappy I am! What a disgrace, what a disgrace!' And she threw herself sobbing into my arms.

"I thought that she really felt remorse, and swore that I would respect her. Then, however, she sank down at my knees, sighing: 'But don't you see that I love you, that you have overcome me, that it seems as though you had thrown a charm over me?'

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"Then I thought it was about time to show myself a man. But she trembled, got up, ran, and hid behind a wardrobe, crying out: 'Oh! don't look at me; no! no! If only you did not see me, if we were only in the dark! I am ashamed in the light. Cannot you imagine it? What a dreadful dream! Oh! this light, this light!"

"I rushed to the window; I closed the outside shutters, drew the curtains, and hung a coat over a ray of light that peeped in, and then, stretching out my hands so as not to fall over the chairs, with my heart beating, I groped for her, and found her.

"This was a fresh journey for the two of us then, feeling our way, with our hands united, toward the other corner where the alcove was. I don't suppose we went straight, for first of all I knocked against the mantelpiece and then against a chest of drawers, before finding what we wanted. Then I forgot everything in a frantic ecstasy. It was an hour of folly, madness, superhuman joy, followed by a delicious lassitude, in which we slept in each other's arms.

"I was half dreaming; but in my dream I fancied that some one was calling me and crying for help; then I received a violent blow, and opened my eyes.

"'Oh —— h!' The setting sun, magnificent and red, shone full into the room through the door, which was wide open. It seemed to look at us from the verge of the horizon, illuminating us both, especially my companion, who was screaming, struggling, and twisting, and trying with hands

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and feet to get hold of a corner of a sheet, a curtain or anything else, while in the middle of the room stood my landlord in a morning coat with the concierge by his side, and a chimney-sweep, as black as the devil, who were looking at us with stupid eyes.

"I sprang up in a rage, ready to jump at his throat, and shouted:

"'What the deuce are you doing in my room?'

"The chimney-sweep laughed so that he let his brush fall on to the floor. The concierge seemed to have gone mad, and the landlord stammered:

"'But, Monsieur, it was — it was — about the chimney — the chimney, the chimney which —'

"'Go to the devil!' I roared. So he took off his hat, which he had kept on in his confusion, and said, in a confused but very civil manner:

"'I beg your pardon, Monsieur; if I had known, I should not have disturbed you; I should not have come. The concierge told me you had gone out. Pray excuse me.' And they all went out.

"Ever since that time I never draw the curtains, but I am always very careful to lock the door first."

## SUICIDES

HARDLY a day goes by without our reading in some newspaper the following paragraph.

"On Wednesday night the people living in No. 40 Rue de —, were awakened by two shots in succession. They seemed to come from the apartment occupied by M. X. —. The door was broken in and the man was found bathed in his blood, still holding in one hand the revolver with which he had taken his life.

"M. X. — was fifty-seven years of age, enjoying a comfortable income, and had everything necessary to make him happy. No cause can be found for his action."

What terrible grief, what unknown suffering, hidden despair, secret wounds drive these presumably happy persons to suicide? We search, we imagine tragedies of love, we suspect financial troubles, and, as we never find anything definite, we apply to these deaths the word "mystery."

A letter found on the desk of one of these "suicides without cause," and written during his last night, beside his loaded revolver, has come into our hands. We deem it rather interesting. It reveals none of those great catastrophes which we always expect to find behind these acts of despair; but it shows us the slow succession of the little vexations of life, the disintegration of a lonely existence,

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whose dreams have disappeared; it gives the reason for these tragic ends, which only nervous and high-strung people can understand.

Here it is:

“It is midnight. When I have finished this letter I shall kill myself. Why? I shall attempt to give the reasons, not for those who may read these lines, but for myself, to kindle my waning courage, to impress upon myself the fatal necessity of this act which could only be deferred.

“I was brought up by simple-minded parents who were unquestioning believers. And I believed as they did.

“My dream lasted a long time. The last veil has just been torn from my eyes.

“During the last few years a strange change has been taking place within me. All the events of Life, which formerly had to me the glow of a beautiful sunset, are now fading away. The true meaning of things has appeared to me in its brutal reality; and the true reason for love has bred in me disgust even for romantic love. ‘We are the eternal toys of foolish and charming illusions, which are always being renewed.’

“On growing older, I had become partly reconciled to the awful mystery of life, to the uselessness of effort; when the emptiness of everything appeared to me in a new light, this evening, after dinner.

“Formerly, I was happy! Everything pleased me: the passing women, the appearance of the streets, the place where I lived; and I even took an

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interest in the cut of my clothes. But the repetition of the same sights has had the result of filling my heart with weariness and disgust, just as one would feel were one to go every night to the same theatre.

"For the last thirty years I have been rising at the same hour; and, at the same restaurant, for thirty years, I have been eating at the same hours the same dishes brought me by different waiters.

"I have tried travel. The loneliness which one feels in strange places terrified me. I felt so alone, so small on the earth that I quickly started on my homeward journey.

"But here the unchanging expression of my furniture, which has stood for thirty years in the same place, the worn armchairs that I had known when quite new, the smell of my apartment (for, with time, each dwelling takes on a particular odour) each night, these and other things disgust me and make me sick of living thus.

"Everything repeats itself endlessly. The way in which I put my key in the lock, the place where I always find my matches, the first object which meets my eye when I enter the room, make me feel like jumping out of the window and putting an end to those monotonous events from which we can never escape.

"Each day, when I shave, I feel an inordinate desire to cut my throat; and my face, which I see in the little mirror, always the same, with soap on my cheeks, has several times made me cry from sadness.

"Now I even hate to be with people whom I

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used to meet with pleasure; I know them so well, I can tell just what they are going to say and what I am going to answer. Each brain is like a circus, where the same horse keeps circling around eternally. In spite of our efforts, our detours, the limit is near, and it is rounded out continuously, without any unexpected sallies, and without a door leading to the unknown. We must circle round always, around the same ideas, the same joys, the same pleasures, the same habits, the same beliefs, the same sensations of disgust.

"The fog was terrible this evening. It enfolded the boulevard, where the street lights were dimmed and looked like smoking candles. A heavier weight than usual oppressed me. Perhaps my digestion was bad.

"For good digestion is everything in life. It gives inspiration to the artist, amorous desires to young people, clear ideas to thinkers, the joy of life to everybody, and it also allows one to eat heartily (which is really the greatest pleasure). A sick stomach induces scepticism, unbelief, nightmares, and a desire for death. I have often noticed this fact. Perhaps I would not kill myself, if my digestion had been good this evening.

"When I sat down in the arm-chair where I have been sitting every day for thirty years, I glanced around me, and just then I was seized by such a terrible distress that I thought I must go mad.

"I tried to think of what I could do to run away from myself. Every occupation struck me as being worse even than inaction. Then I bethought me of putting my papers in order.

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"For a long time I have been thinking of clearing out my drawers; for, for the last thirty years, I have been throwing my letters and bills pell-mell into the same desk, and this confusion has often caused me considerable trouble. But I feel such moral and physical laziness at the sole idea of putting anything in order that I have never had the courage to begin this tedious business.

"I therefore opened my desk, intending to choose among my old papers and destroy the majority of them.

"At first I was bewildered by this array of documents, yellowed by age, then I chose one.

"Oh! if you cherish life, never disturb the burial place of old letters!

"And if, perchance, you should, take the contents by the handful, close your eyes that you may not read a word, so that you may not recognize some forgotten handwriting which may plunge you suddenly into a sea of memories; carry these papers to the fire; and when they are in ashes, crush them to an invisible powder, or otherwise you are lost — just as I have been lost for an hour.

"The first letters which I read not did interest me greatly. They were recent, and came from living men whom I still meet quite often, and whose presence does not move me to any great extent. But all at once one envelope made me start. My name was traced on it in a large, bold, handwriting; and suddenly tears came to my eyes. That letter was from my dearest friend, the companion of my youth, the confidant of my hopes; and he appeared

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before me so clearly, with his pleasant smile and his hand outstretched, that a cold shiver ran down my back. Yes, yes, the dead come back, for I saw him! Our memory is a more perfect world than the universe: it gives back life to those who no longer exist.

“With trembling hand and dimmed eyes I re-read everything that he told me, and in my poor sobbing heart I felt a wound so painful that I began to groan as a man whose bones are slowly being crushed.

“Then I travelled over my whole life, just as one travels along a river. I recognized people so long forgotten that I no longer knew their names. Their faces alone lived in me. In my mother’s letters I saw again the old servants, the shape of our house and the little insignificant odds and ends which cling to our minds.

“Yes, I suddenly saw again all my mother’s old gowns, the different styles which she adopted and the several ways in which she dressed her hair. She haunted me especially in a silk dress, trimmed with old lace; and I remembered something she said one day when she was wearing this dress. She said: ‘Robert, my child, if you do not stand up straight you will be round-shouldered all your life.’

“Then, opening another drawer, I found myself face to face with memories of tender passions: a dancing-pump, a torn handkerchief, even a garter, locks of hair and dried flowers. Then the sweet romances of my life, whose living heroines are now white-haired, plunged me into the deep melancholy of things. Oh, the young brows where blond locks

## SUICIDES

curl, the caress of the hands, the glance which speaks, the hearts which beat, that smile which promises the lips, those lips which promise the embrace! And the first kiss — that endless kiss which makes you close your eyes, which drowns all thought in the immeasurable joy of approaching possession!

“Taking these old pledges of former love in both my hands, I covered them with furious caresses, and in my soul, torn by these memories, I saw them each again at the hour of surrender; and I suffered a torture more cruel than all the tortures invented in all the fables about hell.

“One last letter remained. It was written by me and dictated fifty years ago by my writing teacher.

“Here it is:

“MY DEAR LITTLE MAMMA:

“I am seven years old to-day. It is the age of understanding. I take advantage of it to thank you for having brought me into this world.

“Your little son, who loves you,  
“ROBERT.”

“It is all over. I had gone back to the beginning, and suddenly I turned my glance on what remained to me of life. I saw hideous and lonely old age, and approaching infirmities, and everything over and gone. And nobody near me!

“My revolver is here, on the table. I am loading it. . . . Never re-read your old letters!”

And that is how many men come to kill themselves; and we search in vain to discover some great sorrow in their lives.

## THE KISS

MY little darling: so you are crying from morning until night and from night until morning, because your husband leaves you; you do not know what to do and so you ask your old aunt for advice; you must consider her quite an expert. I don't know as much as you think I do, and yet I am not entirely ignorant of the art of loving, or, rather, of making one's self loved, in which you are a little lacking. I can admit that at my age.

You say that you are all attention, love, kisses and caresses for him. Perhaps that is the very trouble; I think you kiss him too much.

My dear, we have in our hands the most terrible power in the world: love.

Man is gifted with physical strength, and he exercises force. Woman is gifted with charm, and she rules with caresses. It is our weapon, formidable and invincible, but we should know how to use it.

We are the mistresses of the world you know. To tell the history of Love from the beginning of the world would be to tell the history of man himself. Everything springs from it, the arts, great events, customs, wars, the overthrow of empires.

In the Bible you find Delila, Judith; in fables we find Omphale, Helen; in history the Sabines, Cleopatra, and many others.

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Therefore we reign supreme, all-powerful. But, like kings, we must make use of delicate diplomacy.

Love, my dear, is made up of imperceptible sensations. We know that it is as strong as death, but also as frail as glass. The slightest shock breaks it, our power crumbles, and we are never able to build it up again.

We have the power of making ourselves adored, but we lack one tiny thing, understanding of the various shades of caresses, the subtle feeling for what is excessive in the manifestations of our tender feelings. When we are embraced we lose the sentiment of delicacy, while the man over whom we rule remains master of himself, capable of judging the foolishness of certain words. Take care, my dear; that is the defect in our armour. It is our Achilles' heel.

Do you know whence comes our real power? From the kiss, the kiss alone! When we know how to offer and give up our lips we can become queens.

The kiss is only a preface, however, but a charming preface. More charming than the realization itself. A preface which can always be read over again, whereas one cannot always read over the book.

Yes, the meeting of lips is the most perfect, the most divine sensation given to human beings, the supreme limit of happiness. It is in the kiss alone that one sometimes seems to feel this union of souls after which we strive, the intermingling of swooning hearts, as it were.

Do you remember the verses of Sully-Prudhomme:

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Les caresses ne sont que d'inquiets transports,  
Infructueux essais du pauvre Amour qui tente  
L'impossible union des âmes par le corps.

One caress alone gives this deep sensation of two beings welded into one — it is the kiss. No violent delirium of complete possession equals this trembling approach of the lips, this first moist and fresh contact, and then the long, lingering, motionless rapture.

Therefore, my dear, the kiss is our strongest weapon, but we must take care not to dull it. Do not forget that its value is only relative, purely conventional. It continually changes according to circumstances, the state of expectancy and the ecstasy of the mind. I will call attention to one example.

Another poet, François Coppée, has written a line which we all remember, a line which we find delightful, which moves our very hearts.

After describing the expectancy of a lover, waiting in a room one winter's evening, his anxiety, his nervous impatience, the terrible fear of not seeing her, he describes the arrival of the beloved woman, who at last enters hurriedly, out of breath, bringing with her a breath of winter, and he exclaims:

Oh! les premiers baisers à travers la violette!

Is that not a line of exquisite sentiment, a delicate and charming observation, a perfect truth? All those who have hastened to a clandestine meeting, whom passion has thrown into the arms of a

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man, well do they know these first delicious kisses through the veil; and they tremble at the memory of them. And yet their sole charm lies in the circumstances, from being late, from the anxious expectancy, but from the purely — or, rather, impurely, if you prefer — sensual point of view, they are detestable.

Think! Outside it is cold. The young woman has walked quickly; the veil is moist from her cold breath. Little drops of water shine in the lace. The lover seizes her and presses his burning lips to her liquid breath. The moist veil, which dis-colors and carries the dreadful odor of chemical dye, penetrates into the young man's mouth, moistens his mustache. He does not taste the lips of his beloved, he tastes the dye of this lace moistened with cold breath. And yet, like the poet, we would all exclaim:

Oh! les premiers baisers à travers la voilette!

Therefore, the value of this caress being entirely a matter of convention, we must be careful not to abuse it.

Well, my dear, I have several times noticed that you are very clumsy. However, you are not alone in that fault; the majority of women lose their authority by abusing the kiss with untimely kisses. When they feel that their husband or their lover is a little tired, at those times when the heart as well as the body needs rest, instead of understanding what is going on within him, they persist in giving inopportune caresses, tire him by the obstinacy of

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begging lips and give caresses lavished with neither rhyme nor reason.

Trust my experience. First, never kiss your husband in public, in the train, at the restaurant. It is bad taste; do not give in to your desires. He would feel ridiculous and would never forgive you.

Beware of useless kisses lavished in intimacy. I am sure that you abuse them. For instance, I remember one day that you did something quite shocking. Probably you do not remember it.

All three of us were together in the drawing-room, and, as you did not stand on ceremony before me, your husband was holding you on his knees and kissing you at great length on the neck, the lips and throat. Suddenly you exclaimed: "Oh! the fire!" You had been paying no attention to it, and it was almost out. A few lingering embers were glowing on the hearth. Then he rose, ran to the woodbox, from which he dragged two enormous logs with great difficulty, when you came to him with begging lips, murmuring:

"Kiss me!" He turned his head with difficulty and tried to hold up the logs at the same time. Then you gently and slowly placed your mouth on that of the poor fellow, who remained with his neck out of joint, his sides twisted, his arms almost dropping off, trembling with fatigue and tired from his desperate effort. And you kept drawing out this torturing kiss, without seeing or understanding. Then when you freed him, you began to grumble: "How badly you kiss!" No wonder!

Oh, take care of that! We all have this foolish habit, this stupid and inconsiderate impulse to

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choose the most inconvenient moments. When he is carrying a glass of water, when he is putting on his shoes, when he is tying his cravat — in short, when he finds himself in any uncomfortable position — then is the time which we choose for a caress which makes him stop for a whole minute in the middle of what he is doing, with the sole desire of getting rid of us!

Do not think that this criticism is insignificant. Love, my dear, is a delicate thing. The least little thing offends it: everything depends on the tact of our caresses. An ill-placed kiss may do any amount of harm.

Try following my advice.

Your old aunt,

COLLETTE.

## DENIS

MONSIEUR MARAMBOT opened the letter which his servant Denis gave him and smiled.

For twenty years Denis had been a servant in this house. He was a short, stout, jovial man, who was known throughout the countryside as a model servant. He asked:

"Is monsieur pleased? Has monsieur received good news?"

M. Marambot was not rich. He was an old village chemist, a bachelor, who lived on an income acquired with difficulty by selling drugs to the farmers. He answered:

"Yes, my boy. Old man Malois is afraid of the law-suit with which I am threatening him. I shall get my money to-morrow. Five thousand francs will not hurt the account of an old bachelor."

M. Marambot rubbed his hands with satisfaction. He was a man of quiet temperament, more sad than gay, incapable of any prolonged effort, careless in business.

He could undoubtedly have amassed a greater income had he taken advantage of the deaths of colleagues established in more important centres, by taking their places and carrying on their business. But the trouble of moving and the thought of all the preparations had always stopped him. After

thinking the matter over for a few days, he would just say:

"Bah! I'll wait until the next time. I'll not lose anything by the delay. I may even find something better."

Denis, on the contrary, was always urging his master to new enterprises. Of an energetic temperament, he would continually repeat:

"Oh! If I had only had the capital to start out with, I could have made a fortune! One thousand francs would do me."

M. Marambot would smile without answering and would go out in his little garden, where, his hands behind his back, he would walk about dreaming.

All day long, Denis sang the joyful refrains of the folk-songs of the district. He even showed an unusual activity, for he cleaned all the windows of the house, energetically rubbing the glass, and singing at the top of his voice.

M. Marambot, surprised at his zeal, said to him several times, smiling:

"My boy, if you work like that there will be nothing left for you to do to-morrow."

The following day, at about nine o'clock in the morning, the postman gave Denis four letters for his master, one of them very heavy. M. Marambot immediately shut himself up in his room until late in the afternoon. He then handed his servant four letters for the mail. One of them was addressed to M. Malois; it was undoubtedly a receipt for the money.

Denis asked his master no questions; he appeared

to be as sad and gloomy that day as he had seemed joyful the day before.

Night came. M. Marambot went to bed as usual and slept.

He was awakened by a strange noise. He sat up in his bed and listened. Suddenly the door opened and Denis appeared, holding in one hand a candle and in the other a carving knife, his eyes staring, his face contracted as though moved by some deep emotion; he was as pale as a ghost.

In his astonishment M. Marambot thought that he was sleep-walking, and he was going to get out of bed and assist him when the servant blew out the light and rushed for the bed. His master stretched out his hands to receive the shock which knocked him over on his back; he was trying to seize the hands of his servant, whom he now thought to be crazy, in order to avoid the blows which the latter was aiming at him.

He was struck by the knife; once in the shoulder, once in the forehead and the third time in the chest. He fought wildly, waving his arms around in the darkness, kicking and crying:

“Denis! Denis! Are you mad? Listen, Denis!”

But the latter, gasping for breath, kept up his furious attack, always striking, always repulsed, sometimes with a kick, sometimes with a punch, and rushing forward again furiously.

M. Marambot was wounded twice more, once in the leg and once in the stomach. But, suddenly, a thought flashed across his mind, and he began to shriek:

"Stop, stop, Denis, I have not yet received my money!"

The man immediately ceased, and his master could hear his laboured breathing in the darkness.

M. Marambot then went on:

"I have received nothing. M. Malois takes back what he said, the law-suit will take place; that is why you carried the letters to the mail. Just read those on my desk."

With a final effort, he reached for his matches and lit the candle.

He was covered with blood. His sheets, his curtains, and even the walls, were spattered with red. Denis, standing in the middle of the room, was also bloody from head to foot.

When he saw the blood M. Marambot thought himself dead, and fell unconscious.

At break of day he revived. It was some time, however, before he regained his senses, and was able to understand or remember. But, suddenly, the memory of the attack and of his wounds returned to him, and he was filled with such terror that he closed his eyes in order not to see anything. After a few minutes he grew calmer and began to think. He had not died immediately, therefore he might still recover. He felt weak, very weak; but he had no real pain, although he noticed an uncomfortable smarting sensation in several parts of his body. He also felt icy cold, and all wet, and as though wrapped up in bandages. He thought that this dampness came from the blood which he had lost; and he shivered at the dreadful thought of this red liquid which had come from his veins and cov-

ered his bed. The idea of seeing this terrible spectacle again so upset him that he kept his eyes closed with all his strength, as though they might open in spite of himself.

What had become of Denis? He had probably escaped.

But what could he, Marambot, do now? Get up? Call for help? But if he should make the slightest motions, his wounds would undoubtedly open up again and he would die from loss of blood.

Suddenly he heard the door of his room open. His heart almost stopped. It was certainly Denis who was coming to finish him up. He held his breath in order to make the murderer think that he had been successful.

He felt his sheet being lifted up, and then someone feeling his stomach. A sharp pain near his hip made him start. He was being very gently washed with cold water. Therefore, someone must have discovered the misdeed and he was being cared for. A wild joy seized him; but prudently, he did not wish to show that he was conscious. He opened one eye, just one, with the greatest precaution.

He recognised Denis standing beside him, Denis himself! Mercy! He hastily closed his eye again.

Denis. What could he be doing? What did he want? What awful scheme could he now be carrying out?

What was he doing? Well, he was washing him in order to hide the traces of his crime! And he would now bury him in the garden, under ten feet of earth, so that no one could discover him! Or perhaps in the wine cellar under the bottles of old

wine! And M. Marambot began to tremble like a leaf. He kept saying to himself: "I am lost, lost!" He closed his eyes in order not to see the knife as it descended for the final stroke. It did not come. Denis was now lifting him up and bandaging him. Then he began carefully to dress the wound on his leg, as his master had taught him to do when he was a pharmacist.

There was no longer any doubt. His servant, after wishing to kill him, was trying to save him.

Then M. Marambot, in a dying voice, gave him the practical piece of advice:

"Wash the wounds in a diluted solution of carbolic acid!"

Denis answered:

"This is what I am doing, monsieur."

M. Marambot opened both his eyes. There was no sign of blood either on the bed, on the walls, or on the murderer. The wounded man was stretched out on clean white sheets.

The two men looked at each other.

Finally M. Marambot said calmly:

"You have been guilty of a great crime."

Denis answered:

"I am trying to make up for it, monsieur. If you will not tell on me, I will serve you as faithfully as in the past."

This was no time to anger his servant. M. Marambot murmured as he closed his eyes:

"I swear not to tell on you."

Denis saved his master. He spent days and nights without sleep, never leaving the sick room,

preparing drugs, broths, potions, feeling his pulse, anxiously counting the beats, attending him with the skill of a trained nurse and the devotions of a son.

He continually asked:

"Well, monsieur, how do you feel?"

M. Marambot would answer in a weak voice:  
"A little better, my boy, thank you."

And when the sick man would wake up at night, he would often see his servant seated in an arm-chair weeping silently.

Never had the old chemist been so cared for, so fondled, so spoiled. At first he had said to himself:

"As soon as I am well I shall get rid of this rascal."

He was now convalescing, and from day to day he would put off dismissing his murderer. He thought that no one would ever show him such care and attention, for he held this man through fear; and he warned him that he had left a document with a lawyer denouncing him to the law if any new accident should occur.

This precaution seemed to guarantee him against any future attack; and he then asked himself if it would not be wiser to keep this man near him, in order to watch him closely.

Just as formerly, when he would hesitate about taking some larger place of business, he could not make up his mind to any decision.

"There is plenty of time," he would say to himself.

Denis continued to show himself an admirable servant. M. Marambot was well. He kept him.

One morning, just as he was finishing breakfast, he suddenly heard a great noise in the kitchen. He hastened in there. Denis was struggling with two gendarmes. An officer was taking notes on his pad.

As soon as he saw his master, the servant began to sob, exclaiming:

"You told on me, monsieur, that's not right, after what you had promised me. You have broken your word of honour, Monsieur Marambot; that's not right, that's not right!"

M. Marambot, bewildered and distressed at being suspected, lifted his hand.

"I swear to you before God, my boy, that I did not tell on you. I haven't the slightest idea how the police could have found out about your attack on me."

The officer started:

"You say that he attacked you, M. Marambot?"

The bewildered chemist answered:

"Yes — but I did not tell on him — I haven't said a word — I swear it — he has served me excellently from that time on —"

The officer pronounced severely:

"I will take down your testimony. The law will take notice of this new action, of which it was ignorant, Monsieur Marambot. I was commissioned to arrest your servant for the theft of two ducks surreptitiously taken by him from M. Duhamel of which act there are witnesses. I shall make a note of your information."

Then, turning toward his men, he ordered:

"Come on, let us start!"

The two gendarmes dragged Denis out.

The lawyer used the plea of insanity, contrasting the two misdeeds in order to strengthen his argument. He had clearly proved that the theft of the two ducks came from the same mental condition as the eight knife-wounds in the body of Marambot. He had cunningly analyzed all the phases of this transitory condition of mental aberration, which could, doubtless, be cured by a few months' treatment in a reputable sanatorium. He had spoken in enthusiastic terms of the continued devotion of this faithful servant, of the care with which he had surrounded his master, wounded by him in a moment of alienation.

Touched by this memory, M. Marambot felt the tears rising to his eyes.

The lawyer noticed it, opened his arms with a broad gesture, spreading out the long black sleeves of his robe like the wings of a bat, and exclaimed:

"Look, look, gentlemen of the jury, look at those tears. What more can I say for my client? What speech, what argument, what reasoning would be worth these tears of his master? They speak louder than I do, louder than the law; they cry: 'Mercy, for the poor wandering mind of a while ago!' They implore, they pardon, they bless!"

He was silent and sat down.

Then the judge, turning to Marambot, whose testimony had been excellent for his servant, asked him:

"But, monsieur, even admitting that you consider this man insane, that does not explain why you should have kept him. He was none the less dangerous."

D E N I S

Marambot, wiping his eyes, answered:

"Well, your honour, what can you expect? Nowdays it's so hard to find good servants — I could never have found a better one."

Denis was acquitted and put in a sanatorium at his master's expense.

## THE DONKEY

THERE was not a breath of air stirring; a heavy mist was lying over the river. It was like a layer of dull white cotton placed on the water. The banks themselves were indistinct, hidden behind strange fogs. But day was breaking and the hill was becoming visible. At its foot, in the dawning light of day, the plaster houses began to appear like white spots. Cocks were crowing in the barnyard.

On the other side of the river, hidden behind the fogs just opposite Frette, a slight noise from time to time broke the dead silence of the quiet morning. At times it was an indistinct plashing, like the cautious advance of a boat, then again a sharp noise like the rattle of an oar and then the sound of something dropping in the water. Then silence.

Sometimes whispered words, coming perhaps from a distance, perhaps from quite near, pierced through these opaque mists. They passed by like wild birds which have slept in the rushes and which fly away at the first light of day, crossing the mist and uttering a low and timid sound which wakes their brothers along the shores.

Suddenly along the bank, near the village, a barely perceptible shadow appeared on the water. Then it grew, became more distinct and, coming out of the foggy curtain which hung over the river,

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a flat-boat, manned by two men, pushed up on the grass.

The one who was rowing rose and took a pailful of fish from the bottom of the boat, then he threw the dripping net over his shoulder. His companion, who had not made a motion, exclaimed: "Say, Mailloche, get your gun and see if we can't land some rabbit along the shore."

The other one answered: "All right. I'll be with you in a minute." Then he disappeared, in order to hide their catch.

The man who had stayed in the boat slowly filled his pipe and lighted it. His name was Labouise, but he was called Chicot, and was in partnership with Maillochon, commonly called Mailloche, practising the doubtful and undefined profession of junk-gatherers along the shore.

They were a low order of sailors and they navigated regularly only in the months of famine. The rest of the time they acted as junk-gatherers. Rowing about on the river day and night, watching for any prey, dead or alive, poachers on the water and nocturnal hunters, sometimes hunting deer in the Saint-Germain forests, sometimes looking for drowned people and searching their clothes, picking up floating rags and empty bottles; thus did Labouise and Maillochon live easily.

At times they would set out on foot about noon and stroll along straight ahead. They would dine in some inn on the shore and leave again side by side. They would remain away for a couple of days; then one morning they would be seen rowing about in the tub which they called their boat.

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At Joinville or at Nogent some boatman would be looking for his boat, which had disappeared one night, probably stolen, while twenty or thirty miles from there, on the Oise, some shopkeeper would be rubbing his hands, congratulating himself on the bargain he had made when he bought a boat the day before for fifty francs, which two men offered him as they were passing.

Maillochon reappeared with his gun wrapped up in rags. He was a man of forty or fifty, tall and thin, with the restless eye of people who are worried by legitimate troubles, the eyes of hunted animals. His open shirt showed his hairy chest, but he seemed never to have had any more hair on his face than a short brush of a mustache and a few stiff hairs under his lower lip. He was bald around the temples. When he took off the dirty cap that he wore his scalp seemed to be covered with a fluffy down, like the body of a plucked chicken, ready for the spit.

Chicot, on the contrary, was red, fat, short and hairy. He looked like a raw beefsteak hidden in a fireman's cap. He continually kept his left eye closed, as if he were aiming at something or at somebody, and when people jokingly cried to him: "Open your eye, Labouise!" he would answer quietly: "Never fear, kid, I open it when there's cause to."

He had a habit of calling every one kid, even his scavenger companion.

He took up the oars again, and once more the boat disappeared in the heavy mist, which was now turned snowy white in the pink-tinted sky.

## THE DONKEY

"What kind of lead did you take, Maillochon?" Labouise asked.

"Very small, number nine; that's the best for rabbits."

They were approaching the other shore so slowly, so quietly that no noise betrayed them. This bank belongs to the Saint-Germain forest and is the boundary line for rabbit hunting. It is covered with burrows hidden under the roots of trees, and the creatures at daybreak frisk about, running in and out of the holes.

Maillochon was kneeling in the bow, watching, his gun hidden on the floor. Suddenly he seized it, aimed, and the report echoed for some time throughout the quiet country.

Labouise, in a few strokes, touched the beach, and his companion, jumping to the ground, picked up a little gray rabbit, not yet dead.

Then the boat once more disappeared into the fog in order to get to the other side, where it could keep away from the game keepers.

The two men seemed to be riding easily on the water. The weapon had disappeared under the board which served as a hiding place and the rabbit was stuffed into Chicot's loose shirt.

After about a quarter of an hour Labouise asked: "Well, kid, shall we get one more?"

"That will suit me," Maillochon answered.

The boat started swiftly down the current. The mist, which was hiding both shores, was beginning to rise. The trees could be barely perceived, as through a veil, and the little clouds of fog were floating up from the water. When they drew near

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the island, the end of which is opposite Herblay, the two men slackened their pace and began to watch. Soon a second rabbit was killed.

Then they went down until they were half way to Conflans. Here they stopped their boat, tied it to a tree and went to sleep in the bottom of it.

From time to time Labouise would sit up and look over the horizon with his open eye. The last of the morning mist had disappeared and the large summer sun was climbing in the blue sky.

On the other side of the river the vineyard-covered hill stretched out in a semicircle. One house stood out alone at the summit. Everything was silent.

Something was moving slowly along the tow-path, advancing with difficulty. It was a woman dragging a donkey. The stubborn, stiff-jointed beast occasionally stretched out a leg in answer to its companion's efforts, and it proceeded thus, with out-stretched neck and ears lying flat, so slowly that one could not tell when it would ever be out of sight.

The woman, bent double, was pulling, turning round occasionally to strike the donkey with a stick.

As soon as he saw her, Labouise exclaimed: "Hey, Mailloche!"

Mailloche answered: "What's the matter?"

"Want to have some fun?"

"Of course!"

"Then hurry, kid; we're going to have a laugh."

Chicot took the oars. When he had crossed the river he stopped opposite the woman and called: "Hey, sister!"

## THE DONKEY

The woman stopped dragging her donkey and looked.

Labouise continued: "What are you doing — going to the locomotive show?"

The woman made no reply. Chicot continued: "That nag must have won a prize at the races. Where are you taking him at that speed?"

At last the woman answered: "I'm going to Macquart, at Champioux, to have him killed. He's worthless."

Labouise answered: "You're right. How much do you think Macquart will give you for him?"

The woman wiped her forehead on the back of her hand and hesitated, saying: "How do I know? Perhaps three francs, perhaps four."

Chicot exclaimed: "I'll give you five francs and your errand's done! How's that?"

The woman considered the matter for a second and then exclaimed: "Done!"

The two men landed. Labouise grasped the animal by the bridle. Maillochon asked in surprise: "What do you expect to do with that carcass?"

Chicot this time opened his other eye in order to express his gaiety. His whole red face was grinning with joy. He chuckled: "Don't worry, kid. I've got my idea."

He gave five francs to the woman, who then sat down by the road to see what was going to happen. Then Laboise, in great humour, got the gun and held it out to Maillochon, saying: "Each one in turn; we're going after big game, kid. Don't get so near or you'll kill it right off! You must make the pleasure last a little."

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He placed his companion about forty paces from the victim. The ass, feeling itself free, was trying to get a little of the tall grass, but it was so exhausted that it swayed on its legs as if it were about to fall.

Maillochon aimed slowly and said: "A little pepper for the ears; watch, Chicot!" And he fired.

The tiny shot struck the donkey's long ears and he began to shake them in order to get rid of the stinging sensation. The two men were doubled up with laughter and stamped their feet with joy. The woman, indignant, rushed forward; she did not want her donkey to be tortured, and she offered to return the five francs. Labouise threatened her with a thrashing and pretended to roll up his sleeves. He had paid, hadn't he? Well, then, he would take a shot at her skirts, just to show that it didn't hurt. She went away, threatening to call the police. They could hear her protesting indignantly and cursing as she went her way.

Maillochon held out the gun to his comrade, saying: "It's your turn, Chicot."

Labouise aimed and fired. The donkey received the charge in his thighs, but the shot was so small and came from such a distance that he thought he was being stung by flies, for he began to thrash himself with his tail.

Labouise sat down to laugh more comfortably, while Maillochon reloaded the weapon, so happy that he seemed to sneeze into the barrel. He stepped forward a few paces, and, aiming at the same place that his friend had shot at, he fired

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again. This time the beast started, tried to kick and turned its head. At last a little blood was running. It had been wounded and felt a sharp pain, for it tried to run away with a slow, limping, jerky gallop.

Both men darted after the beast, Maillochon with a long stride, Labouise with the short breathless trot of a little man. But the donkey, tired out, had stopped, and, with a bewildered look, was watching his two murderers approach. Suddenly he stretched his neck and began to bray.

Labouise, out of breath, had taken the gun. This time he walked right up close, as he did not wish to begin the chase over again.

When the poor beast had finished its mournful cry, like a last call for help, the man called: "Hey, Mailloche! Come here, kid; I'm going to give him some medicine." And while the other man was forcing the animal's mouth open, Chicot stuck the barrel of his gun down its throat, as if he were trying to make it drink a potion. Then he said: "Look out, kid, here she goes!"

He pressed the trigger. The donkey stumbled back a few steps, fell down, tried to get up again and finally lay on its side and closed its eyes. The whole body was trembling, its legs were kicking as if it were trying to run. A stream of blood was oozing through its teeth. Soon it stopped moving. It was dead.

The two men stopped laughing. It was over too quickly; they had not had their money's worth. Maillochon asked: "Well, what are we going to do now?"

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Labouise answered: "Don't worry, kid. Get the thing on the boat; we're going to have some fun when night comes."

They went and got the boat. The animal's body was placed on the bottom, covered with fresh grass, and the two men stretched out on it and went to sleep.

Toward noon Labouise drew a bottle of wine, some bread and butter and raw onions from a hiding place in their muddy, worm-eaten boat, and they began to eat.

When the meal was over they once more stretched out on the dead donkey and slept. At nightfall Labouise awoke and shook his comrade, who was snoring like a buzz-saw. "Come on, kid," he ordered.

Maillochon began to row. As they had plenty of time they went up the Seine slowly. They coasted along the reaches covered with water-lilies, and the heavy, mud-covered boat slipped over the lily pads and bent the flowers, which stood up again as soon as they had passed.

When they reached the wall of the Éperon, which separates the Saint-Germain forest from the Maisons-Laffitte Park, Labouise stopped his companion and explained his idea to him. Maillochon was moved by a prolonged, silent laugh.

They threw into the water the grass which had covered the body, took the animal by the feet and hid it behind some bushes. Then they got into their boat again and went to Maisons-Laffitte.

The night was perfectly black when they reached the wine shop of old man Jules. As soon as the

## THE DONKEY

dealer saw them he came up, shook hands with them and sat down at their table. They began to talk of one thing and another. By eleven o'clock the last customer had left and old man Jules winked at Labouise and asked: "Well, have you got any?"

Labouise made a motion with his head and answered: "Perhaps so, perhaps not!"

The dealer insisted: "Perhaps you've got nothing but gray ones?"

Chicot dug his hands into his flannel shirt, drew out the ears of a rabbit and declared: "Three francs a pair!"

Then began a long discussion about the price. Two francs sixty-five and the two rabbits were delivered. As the two men were getting up to go, old man Jules, who had been watching them, exclaimed: "You have something else, but you won't say what."

Labouise answered: "Possibly, but it is not for you; you're too stingy."

The man, growing eager, kept asking: "What is it? Something big? Perhaps we might make a deal."

Labouise, who seemed perplexed, pretended to consult Maillochon with a glance. Then he answered in a slow voice: "This is how it is. We were in the bushes at Éperon when something passed right near us, to the left, at the end of the wall. Mailloche takes a shot and it drops. We skipped on account of the game people. I can't tell you what it is, because I don't know. But it's big enough. But what is it? If I told you I'd be lying, and you know, kid, between us everything's aboveboard."

## THE DONKEY

Anxiously the man asked: "Think it's a deer?"

Labouise answered: "Might be and then again it might not! Deer? — uh! uh! — might be a little big for that! Mind you, I don't say it's a doe, because I don't know, but it might be."

Still the dealer insisted: "Perhaps it's a buck?"

Labouise stretched out his hand, exclaiming: "No, it's not that! It's not a buck. I should have seen the horns. No, it's not a buck!"

"Why didn't you bring it with you?" asked the man.

"Because, kid, from now on I sell on the spot. Plenty of people will buy. All you have to do is to take a walk over there, find the thing and take it. No risk for me."

The innkeeper, growing suspicious, exclaimed: "Supposing he wasn't there!"

Labouise once more raised his hand and said: "He's there, I swear! — first bush to the left. What it is, I don't know. But it's not a buck, I'm positive. It's for you to find out what it is. Twenty francs, cash down!"

Still the man hesitated: "Couldn't you bring it?"

Maillochon then became spokesman:

"Then there is no bargain. If it is a buck, it will be fifty francs, if it is a doe, twenty-five; that's our price."

The dealer decided: "It's a bargain for twenty francs!"

And they shook hands over the deal.

Then he took out four big five-francs pieces from the cash drawer, and the two friends pocketed the money. Labouise arose, emptied his glass and left.

## THE DONKEY

As he was disappearing in the shadows he turned round to explain: "It isn't a buck. I don't know what it is! — but it's there. I'll give you back your money if you find nothing!"

And he disappeared in the darkness. Maillochon, who was following him, kept punching him in the back to express his delight.

## AN IDYLL

THE train had just left Genoa, in the direction of Marseilles, and was following the rocky and sinuous coast, gliding like an iron serpent between the sea and the mountains, creeping over the yellow sand edged with silver waves and entering into the black-mouthing tunnels like a beast into its lair.

In the last carriage, a stout woman and a young man sat opposite each other. They did not speak, but occasionally they would glance at each other. She was about twenty-five years old. Seated by the window, she silently gazed at the passing landscape. She was from Piedmont, a peasant, with large black eyes, a full bust and fat cheeks. She had deposited several parcels on the wooden seat and she held a basket on her knees.

The man might have been twenty years old. He was thin and sunburned, with the dark complexion that denotes work in the open. Tied up in a handkerchief was his whole fortune; a pair of heavy boots, a pair of trousers, a shirt and a coat. Hidden under the seat were a shovel and a pick-axe tied together with a rope.

He was going to France to seek work.

The sun, rising in the sky, spread a fiery light over the coast; it was toward the end of May and delightful odours entered into the railway carriage.

## AN IDYLL

The blooming orange and lemon-trees exhaled a heavy, sweet perfume that mingled with the breath of the roses which grew in profusion along the railroad track, as well as in the gardens of the wealthy and the humble homes of the peasants.

Roses are so completely at home along this coast! They fill the whole region with their dainty and powerful fragrance and make the atmosphere taste like a delicacy, something better than wine, and as intoxicating.

The train was going at slow speed as if loath to leave behind this wonderful garden! It stopped every few minutes at small stations, at clusters of white houses, then went on again leisurely, emitting long whistles. Nobody got in. One would have thought that all the world had gone to sleep and made up its mind not to travel on that sultry spring morning. The plump peasant woman from time to time closed her eyes, but she would open them suddenly whenever her basket slid from her lap. She would catch it, replace it, look out of the window a little while and then doze off again. Tiny beads of perspiration covered her brow and she breathed with difficulty, as if suffering from a painful oppression.

The young man had let his head fall on his breast and was sleeping the sound sleep of the labouring man.

All of a sudden, just as the train left a small station, the peasant woman woke up and opening her basket, drew forth a piece of bread, some hard-boiled eggs, and a flask of wine and some fine, red plums. She began to munch contentedly.

## AN IDYLL

The man had also wakened and he watched the woman, watched every morsel that travelled from her knees to her lips. He sat with his arms folded, his eyes set and his lips tightly compressed.

The woman ate like a glutton, with relish. Every little while she would take a swallow of wine to wash down the eggs and then she would stop for breath.

Everything vanished, the bread, the eggs, the plums and the wine. As soon as she finished her meal, the man closed his eyes. Then, feeling ill at ease, she loosened her blouse and the man suddenly looked at her again.

She did not seem to mind and continued to unbutton her dress.

The pressure of her flesh causing the opening to gape, she revealed a portion of white linen chemise and a portion of her skin.

As soon as she felt more comfortable, she turned to her fellow-traveller and remarked in Italian: "It's fine weather for travelling."

"Are you from Piedmont?" he asked. "I'm from Asti."

"And I'm from Casale."

They were neighbours and they began to talk.

They exchanged the commonplace remarks that working people repeat over and over and which are all-sufficient for their slow-working and narrow minds. They spoke of their homes and found out that they had a number of mutual acquaintances.

They quoted names and became more and more friendly as they discovered more and more people

## AN IDYLL

they knew. Short, rapid words, with sonorous endings and the Italian cadence, gushed from their lips.

After that, they talked about themselves. She was married and had three children whom she had left with her sister, for she had found a situation as nurse, a good situation with a French lady at Marseilles.

He was going to look for work.

He had been told that he would be able to find it in France, for they were building a great deal, he had heard.

They found nothing to talk about after that.

The heat was becoming terrible; it beat down like fire on the roof of the railway carriage. A cloud of dust flew behind the train and entered through the window, and the fragrance of the roses and orange-blossoms had become stronger, heavier and more penetrating.

The two travellers went to sleep again.

They awakened almost at the same time. The sun was nearing the edge of the horizon and shed its glorious light on the blue sea. The atmosphere was lighter and cooler.

The nurse was gasping. Her dress was open and her cheeks looked flabby and moist, and in an oppressed voice, she breathed:

"I have not nursed since yesterday; I feel as if I were going to faint."

The man did not reply; he hardly knew what to say.

She continued: "When a woman has as much milk as I, she must nurse three times a day or she'll

## AN IDYLL

feel uncomfortable. It feels like a weight on my heart, a weight that prevents my breathing and just exhausts me. It's terrible to have so much milk."

He replied: "Yes, it must be very annoying."

She really seemed ill and almost ready to faint. She murmured: "I only have to press and the milk flows out like a fountain. It is really interesting to see. You wouldn't believe it. In Casale, all the neighbours came to see it."

He replied: "Ah! really."

"Yes, really. I would show you, only it wouldn't help me. You can't make enough come out that way."

And she paused.

The train stopped at a station. Leaning on a fence was a woman holding a crying infant in her arms. She was thin and in rags.

The nurse watched her. Then she said in a compassionate tone: "There's a woman I could help. And the baby could help me, too. I'm not rich; am I not leaving my home, my people and my baby to take a place, but still, I'd give five francs to have that child and be able to nurse it for ten minutes. It would quiet him, and me too, I can tell you. I think I would feel as if I were being born again."

She paused again. Then she passed her hot hand several times across her wet brow and moaned: "Oh! I can't stand it any longer. I believe I shall die." And with an unconscious motion, she completely opened her waist.

Her right breast appeared all swollen and stiff,

## AN IDYLL

with its brown teat, and the poor woman gasped: "Ah! mon Dieu! mon Dieu! What shall I do?"

The train had left the station and was continuing its route amid the flowers that gave forth their penetrating fragrance.

Once in a while a fishing smack glided over the blue sea with its motionless sail, which was reflected in the clear water as if another boat were turned upside down.

The young man, embarrassed, stammered: "But — madam — I — might perhaps be — be able to help you."

In an exhausted whisper, she replied: "Yes, if you will be so kind, you'll do me a great favour. I can't stand it any longer, really I can't."

He got on his knees before her; and she leaned over to him with a motherly gesture as if he were a child. In the movement she made to draw near to the man, a drop of milk appeared on her breast. He absorbed it quickly, and, taking this heavy breast in his mouth like a fruit, he began to drink regularly and greedily.

He had passed his arms around the woman's waist and pressed her close to him in order not to lose a drop of the nourishment. And he drank with slow gulps, like a baby.

All of a sudden she said: "That's enough, now the other side!" And he obeyed her with alacrity.

She had placed both hands on his back and now was breathing happily, freely, enjoying the perfume of the flowers carried on the breeze that entered the open windows.

"It smells mighty good," she said.

## AN IDYLL

He made no reply and continued to drink at the living fountain of her breast, closing his eyes to better taste the mild fluid.

But she gently pushed him from her.

"That's enough. I feel much better now. It has put life into me again."

He rose and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand.

While she replaced her breasts inside her dress, she said:

"You did me a great favour. I thank you very much!"

And he replied in a grateful tone:

"It is I who thank you, for I hadn't eaten a thing for two days!"

## THE STRING

A LONG all the roads around Goderville the peasants and their wives were coming toward the little town, for it was market day. The men were proceeding with slow steps, the whole body bent forward at each movement of their long twisted legs, deformed by their hard work, by the weight on the plough which, at the same time, raised the left shoulder and distorted the figure, by the reaping of the wheat which made them spread their knees to get a firm stand, by all the slow and painful labours of the country. Their blouses, blue, starched, shining as if varnished, ornamented with a little design in white at the neck and wrists, puffed about their bony bodies, seemed like balloons ready to carry them off. From each of them a head, two arms, and two feet protruded.

Some led a cow or a calf at the end of a rope, and their wives, walking behind the animal, whipped its haunches with a leafy branch to hasten its progress. They carried large baskets on their arms from which, in some cases, chickens and, in others, ducks thrust out their heads. And they walked with a quicker, livelier step than their husbands. Their spare straight figures were wrapped in a scanty little shawl, pinned over their flat bosoms, and their heads were enveloped in a piece

## THE STRING

of white linen tightly pressed on the hair and surmounted by a cap.

Then a wagon passed at the jerky trot of a nag, shaking strangely, two men seated side by side and a woman in the bottom of the vehicle, the latter holding on to the sides to lessen the hard jolts.

In the square of Goderville there was a crowd, a throng of human beings and animals mixed together. The horns of the cattle, the tall hats with a long nap of the rich peasant, and the headgear of the peasant women rose above the surface of the crowd. And the clamorous, shrill, screaming voices made a continuous and savage din which sometimes was dominated by the robust lungs of some countryman's laugh, or the long lowing of a cow tied to the wall of a house.

It all smacked of the stable, the dairy and the manure heap, of hay and sweat, giving forth that unpleasant odour, human and animal, peculiar to the people of the fields.

Maître Hauchecorne, of Bréauté, had just arrived at Goderville, and he was directing his steps toward the public square, when he perceived upon the ground a little piece of string. Maître Hauchecorne, economical like a true Norman, thought that everything useful ought to be picked up, and he stooped painfully, for he suffered from rheumatism. He took the bit of thin cord from the ground and was beginning to roll it carefully when he noticed Maître Malandain, the harness-maker, on the threshold of his door, looking at him. They had heretofore had business together on the subject of a halter, and they were on bad terms, being

## THE STRING

both good haters. Maître Hauchecorne was seized with a sort of shame to be seen thus by his enemy, picking a bit of string out of the dirt. He concealed his find quickly under his blouse, then in his trousers pocket; then he pretended to be still looking on the ground for something which he did not find, and he went towards the market, his head thrust forward, bent double by his pains.

He was soon lost in the noisy and slowly moving crowd, which was busy with interminable bargainings. The peasants looked at cows, went and came, perplexed, always in fear of being cheated, not daring to decide, watching the vender's eye, ever trying to find the trick in the man and the flaw in the beast.

The women, having placed their great baskets at their feet, had taken out the poultry, which lay upon the ground, tied together by the feet, with terrified eyes and scarlet crests.

They heard offers, stated their prices with a dry air and impassive face, or perhaps, suddenly deciding on some proposed reduction, shouted to the customer who was slowly going away: "All right, Maître Anthime, I'll give it to you for that."

Then little by little the square was deserted, and the Angelus ringing at noon, those who lived too far away went to the different inns.

At Jourdain's the great room was full of people eating, as the big yard was full of vehicles of all kinds, carts, gigs, wagons, nondescript carts, yellow with dirt, mended and patched, raising their shafts to the sky like two arms, or perhaps with their shafts in the ground and their backs in the air.

## THE STRING

Very near the diners seated at the table, the immense fireplace, filled with bright flames, cast a lively heat on the backs of the row on the right. Three spits were turning on which were chickens, pigeons, and legs of mutton; and an appetizing odour of roast meat and gravy dripping over the nicely browned skin rose from the hearth, increased the jovialness, and made everybody's mouth water.

All the aristocracy of the plough ate there, at Maître Jourdain's, tavern keeper and horse dealer, a clever fellow who had money.

The dishes were passed and emptied, as were the jugs of yellow cider. Everyone told his affairs, his purchases, and sales. They discussed the crops. The weather was favourable for the green things but rather damp for the wheat.

Suddenly the drum began to beat in the yard, before the house. Everybody rose, except a few indifferent persons, and ran to the door, or to the windows, their mouths still full and napkins in their hands.

After the public crier had ceased his drum-beating, he called out in a jerky voice, speaking his phrases irregularly:

"It is hereby made known to the inhabitants of Goderville, and in general to all persons present at the market, that there was lost this morning, on the road to Benzeville, between nine and ten o'clock, a black leather pocketbook containing five hundred francs and some business papers. The finder is requested to return same to the mayor's office or to Maître Fortuné Houlbrèque of Manneville. There will be twenty francs reward."

## THE STRING

Then the man went away. The heavy roll of the drum and the crier's voice were again heard at a distance.

Then they began to talk of this event discussing the chances that Maître Houlbrèque had of finding or not finding his pocketbook.

And the meal concluded. They were finishing their coffee when the chief of the gendarmes appeared upon the threshold.

He inquired:

"Is Maître Hauchecorne, of Bréauté, here?"

Maître Hauchecorne, seated at the other end of the table, replied:

"Here I am."

And the officer resumed:

"Maître Hauchecorne, will you have the goodness to accompany me to the mayor's office? The mayor would like to talk to you."

The peasant, surprised and disturbed, swallowed at a draught his tiny glass of brandy, rose, and, even more bent than in the morning, for the first steps after each rest were specially difficult, set out, repeating: "Here I am, here I am."

The mayor was awaiting him, seated on an arm-chair. He was the notary of the vicinity, a stout, serious man, with pompous phrases.

"Maître Hauchecorne," said he, "you were seen this morning picking up, on the road to Benzeville, the pocketbook lost by Maître Houlbrèque, of Manneville."

The countryman, looked at the mayor in astonishment, already terrified, by this suspicion resting on him without his knowing why.

## THE STRING

"Me? Me? I picked up the pocketbook?"

"Yes, you, yourself."

"On my word of honour, I never heard of it."

"But you were seen."

"I was seen, me? Who says he saw me?"

"Monsieur Malandain, the harness-maker."

The old man remembered, understood, and flushed with anger.

"Ah, he saw me, the clodhopper, he saw me pick up this string, here, Mr. Mayor." And rummaging in his pocket he drew out the little piece of string.

But the mayor, incredulous, shook his head.

"You will not make me believe, Maître Hauchecorne, that Monsieur Malandain, who is a man we can believe, mistook this cord for a pocketbook."

The peasant, furious, lifted his hand, spat at one side to attest his honour, repeating:

"It is nevertheless the truth of the good God, the sacred truth, Mr. Mayor. I repeat it on my soul and my salvation."

The mayor resumed:

"After picking up the object, you stood like a stilt, looking a long while in the mud to see if any piece of money had fallen out."

The old chap choked with indignation and fear.

"How anyone can tell — how anyone can tell — such lies to take away an honest man's reputation! How can anyone — "

There was no use in his protesting, nobody believed him. He was confronted with Monsieur Malandain, who repeated and maintained his affirmation. They abused each other for an hour. At his

## THE STRING

own request, Maître Hauchecorne was searched, nothing was found on him.

Finally the mayor, very much perplexed, discharged him with the warning that he would consult the public prosecutor and ask for further orders.

The news had spread. As he left the mayor's office, the old man was surrounded and questioned with a serious or bantering curiosity, in which there was no indignation. He began to tell the story of the string. No one believed him. They laughed at him.

He went along, stopping his friends, beginning endlessly his statement and his protestations, showing his pockets turned inside out, to prove that he had nothing.

They said:

"Old rascal, get out!"

And he grew angry, becoming exasperated, hot, and distressed at not being believed, not knowing what to do and always repeating himself.

Night came. He must depart. He started on his way with three neighbours to whom he pointed out the place where he had picked up the bit of string; and all along the road he spoke of his adventure.

In the evening he took a turn in the village of Bréauté, in order to tell it to everybody. He only met with incredulity.

It made him ill all night.

The next day about one o'clock in the afternoon, Marius Paumelle, a hired man in the employ of Maître Breton, husbandman at Ymauville, returned the pocketbook and its contents to Maître Houlbrèque of Manneville.

## THE STRING

This man claimed to have found the object in the road; but not knowing how to read, he had carried it to the house and given it to his employer.

The news spread through the neighbourhood. Maître Hauchecorne was informed of it. He immediately went the circuit and began to recount his story completed by the happy climax. He triumphed.

"What grieved me so much was not the thing itself, as the lying. There is nothing so shameful as to be placed under a cloud on account of a lie."

He talked of his adventure all day long, he told it on the highway to people who were passing by, in the inn to people who were drinking there, and to persons coming out of church the following Sunday. He stopped strangers to tell them about it. He was calm now, and yet something disturbed him without his knowing exactly what it was. People had the air of joking while they listened. They did not seem convinced. He seemed to feel that remarks were being made behind his back.

On Tuesday of the next week he went to the market at Goderville, urged solely by the necessity he felt of discussing the case.

Malandain, standing at his door, began to laugh on seeing him pass. Why?

He approached a farmer from Criquetot, who did not let him finish, and giving him a thump in the stomach said to his face:

"You clever rogue."

Then he turned his back on him.

Maître Hauchecorne was confused, why was he called a clever rogue?

## THE STRING

When he was seated at the table, in Jourdain's tavern he commenced to explain "the affair."

A horse dealer from Monvilliers called to him:

"Come, come, old sharper, that's an old trick; I know all about your piece of string!"

Hauchecorne stammered:

"But since the pocketbook was found."

But the other man replied:

"—Shut up, papa, there is one that finds, and there is one that brings back. No one is any the wiser, so you get out of it."

The peasant stood choking. He understood. They accused him of having had the pocketbook returned by a confederate, by an accomplice.

He tried to protest. All the table began to laugh.

He could not finish his dinner and went away, in the midst of jeers.

He went home ashamed and indignant, choking with anger and confusion, the more dejected that he was capable with his Norman cunning of doing what they had accused him of, and even of boasting of it as of a good trick. His innocence to him, in a confused way, was impossible to prove, as his sharpness was known. And he was stricken to the heart by the injustice of the suspicion.

Then he began to recount the adventure again, enlarging his story every day, adding each time, new reasons, more energetic protestations, more solemn oaths which he imagined and prepared in his hours of solitude, his whole mind given up to the story of the string. He was believed so much the less as his defense was more complicated and his arguing more subtle.

## THE STRING

"Those are lying excuses," they said behind his back.

He felt it, consumed his heart over it, and wore himself out with useless efforts. He was visibly wasting away.

The wags now made him tell about the string to amuse them, as they make a soldier who has been on a campaign tell about his battles. His mind, seriously affected, began to weaken.

Towards the end of December he took to his bed.

He died in the first days of January, and in the delirium of his death struggles he kept claiming his innocence, reiterating.

"A piece of string, a piece of string, — look — here it is, Mr. Mayor."

## WAITER, A BOCK

WHY did I go into that beer hall on that particular evening? I do not know. It was cold; a fine rain, a flying mist, veiled the gas lamps with a transparent fog, made the sidewalks reflect the light that streamed from the shop windows, lighting up the soft slush and the muddy feet of the passers-by.

I was going nowhere in particular; was simply having a short walk after dinner. I had passed the Crédit Lyonnais, the Rue Vivienne, and several other streets. I suddenly perceived a large beer hall which was more than half full. I walked inside, with no object in view. I was not the least thirsty.

I glanced round to find a place that was not too crowded, and went and sat down by the side of a man who seemed to me to be old, and who was smoking a cheap clay pipe, which was as black as coal. From six to eight saucers piled up on the table in front of him indicated the number of bocks he had already absorbed. At a glance I recognized a bock-drinker, one of those frequenters of beer houses who come in the morning when the place opens, and do not leave till evening when it is about to close. He was dirty, bald on top of his head, with a fringe of iron-gray hair falling on the collar of his frock coat. His clothes, which were

## WAITER, A BOCK

much too large for him, appeared to have been made for him at a time when he was corpulent. One could guess that he did not wear suspenders, for he could not take ten steps without having to stop to pull up his trousers. Did he wear a waistcoat? The mere thought of his boots and of that which they covered filled me with horror. The frayed cuffs were perfectly black at the edges, as were his nails.

As soon as I had seated myself beside him, this individual said to me in a quiet tone of voice:

“How goes it?”

I turned sharply round and closely scanned his features, whereupon he continued:

“I see you do not recognize me.”

“No, I do not.”

“Des Barrets.”

I was stupefied. It was the Comte Jean des Barrets, my old college chum.

I seized him by the hand, and was so dumbfounded that I could find nothing to say. At length I managed to stammer out:

“And you, how goes it with you?”

He responded placidly:

“I get along as best I can.”

“What are you doing now?” I asked.

“You see what I am doing,” he answered quite resignedly.

I felt my face getting red. I insisted:

“But every day?”

“Every day it is the same thing,” was his reply, accompanied with a thick puff of tobacco smoke.

## WAITER, A BOCK

He then tapped with a sou on the top of the marble table, to attract the attention of the waiter, and called out:

“Waiter, two bocks.”

A voice in the distance repeated:

“Two bocks for the fourth table.”

Another voice, more distant still, shouted out:  
“Here they are!”

Immediately a man with a white apron appeared, carrying two bocks, which he set down, foaming, on the table, spilling some of the yellow liquid on the sandy floor in his haste.

Des Barrets emptied his glass at a single draught and replaced it on the table, while he sucked in the foam that had been left on his mustache. He next asked:

“What is there new?”

I really had nothing new to tell him. I stammered:

“Nothing, old man. I am a business man.”

In his monotonous tone of voice he said:

“Indeed, does it amuse you?”

“No, but what can I do? One must do something!”

“Why should one?”

“So as to have occupation.”

“What’s the use of an occupation? For my part, I do nothing at all, as you see, never anything. When one has not a sou I can understand why one should work. But when one has enough to live on, what’s the use? What is the good of working? Do you work for yourself, or for others? If you work for yourself, you do it for your own amusement,

## WAITER, A BOCK

which is all right; if you work for others, you are a fool."

Then, laying his pipe on the marble table, he called out anew:

"Waiter, a bock." And continued: "It makes me thirsty to keep calling so. I am not accustomed to that sort of thing. Yes, yes, I do nothing. I let things slide, and I am growing old. In dying I shall have nothing to regret. My only remembrance will be this beer hall. No wife, no children, no cares, no sorrows, nothing. That is best."

He then emptied the glass which had been brought him, passed his tongue over his lips, and resumed his pipe.

I looked at him in astonishment, and said:  
"But you have not always been like that?"

"Pardon me; ever since I left college."

"That is not a proper life to lead, my dear fellow; it is simply horrible. Come, you must have something to do, you must love something, you must have friends."

"No, I get up at noon, I come here, I have my breakfast, I drink my beer, I remain until the evening, I have my dinner, I drink beer. Then about half-past one in the morning, I go home to bed, because the place closes up; that annoys me more than anything. In the last ten years I have passed fully six years on this bench, in my corner; and the other four in my bed, nowhere else. I sometimes chat with the regular customers."

"But when you came to Paris what did you do at first?"

"I paid my devoirs to the Café de Médicis."

## WAITER, A BOCK

"What next?"

"Next I crossed the water and came here."

"Why did you take that trouble?"

"What do you mean? One cannot remain all one's life in the Latin Quarter. The students make too much noise. Now I shall not move again. Waiter, a bock."

I began to think that he was making fun of me, and I continued:

"Come now, be frank. You have been the victim of some great sorrow; some disappointment in love, no doubt! It is easy to see that you are a man who has had some trouble. What age are you?"

"I am thirty, but I look forty-five, at least."

I looked him straight in the face. His wrinkled, ill-shaven face gave one the impression that he was an old man. On the top of his head a few long hairs waved over a skin of doubtful cleanliness. He had enormous eyelashes, a heavy mustache, and a thick beard. Suddenly I had a kind of vision, I know not why, of a basin filled with dirty water in which all that hair had been washed. I said to him:

"You certainly look older than your age. You surely must have experienced some great sorrow."

He replied:

"I tell you that I have not. I am old because I never go out into the air. Nothing makes a man deteriorate more than the life of a café."

I still could not believe him.

"You must surely also have been married? One could not get as bald-headed as you are without having been in love."

## WAITER, A BOCK

He shook his head, shaking dandruff down on his coat as he did so.

"No, I have always been virtuous."

And, raising his eyes toward the chandelier which heated our heads, he said:

"If I am bald, it is the fault of the gas. It destroys the hair. Waiter, a bock. Are you not thirsty?"

"No, thank you. But you really interest me. Since when have you been so morbid? Your life is not normal, it is not natural. There is something beneath it all."

"Yes, and it dates from my infancy. I received a great shock when I was very young, and that turned my life into darkness which will last to the end."

"What was it?"

"You wish to know about it? Well, then, listen. You recall, of course, the castle in which I was brought up, for you used to spend five or six months there during vacation. You remember that large gray building, in the middle of a great park, and the long avenues of oaks which opened to the four points of the compass. You remember my father and mother, both of whom were ceremonious, solemn, and severe.

"I worshipped my mother; I was afraid of my father; but I respected both, accustomed always as I was to see every one bow before them. They were Monsieur le Comte and Madame la Comtesse to all the country round, and our neighbours, the Tanne-mares, the Ravelets, the Brennevilles, showed them the utmost consideration.

"I was then thirteen years old. I was happy,

## WAITER, A BOCK

pleased with everything, as one is at that age, full of the joy of life.

"Well, toward the end of September, a few days before returning to college, as I was playing about in the shrubbery of the park, among the branches and leaves, as I was crossing a path, I saw my father and mother walking along.

"I recall it as though it were yesterday. It was a very windy day. The whole line of trees swayed beneath the gusts of wind, groaning, and seeming to utter cries — those dull, deep cries that forests give out during a tempest.

"The falling leaves, turning yellow, flew away like birds, circling and falling, and then running along the path like swift animals.

"Evening came on. It was dark in the thickets. The motion of the wind and of the branches excited me, made me tear about as if I were crazy, and howl in imitation of the wolves.

"As soon as I perceived my parents, I crept furtively toward them, under the branches, in order to surprise them, as though I had been a veritable prowler. But I stopped in fear a few paces from them. My father, who was in a terrible passion, cried:

"Your mother is a fool; moreover, it is not a question of your mother. It is you. I tell you that I need this money, and I want you to sign this."

"My mother replied in a firm voice:

"I will not sign it. It is Jean's fortune. I shall guard it for him and I will not allow you to squander it with vile women; you have your own inheritance."

## WAITER, A BOCK

"Then my father, trembling with rage, wheeled round and, seizing his wife by the throat, began to slap her with all his might full in the face with his disengaged hand.

"My mother's hat fell off, her hair became loosened and fell over her shoulders; she tried to parry the blows, but she could not do so. And my father, like a madman, kept on striking her. My mother rolled over on the ground, covering her face with her hands. Then he turned her over on her back in order to slap her still more, pulling away her hands, which were covering her face.

"As for me, my friend, it seemed as though the world was coming to an end, that the eternal laws had changed. I experienced the overwhelming dread that one has in presence of things supernatural, in presence of irreparable disasters. My childish mind was bewildered, distracted. I began to cry with all my might, without knowing why; a prey to a fearful dread, sorrow, and astonishment. My father heard me, turned round, and, on seeing me, started toward me. I believe that he wanted to kill me, and I fled like a hunted animal, running straight ahead into the thicket.

"I ran perhaps for an hour, perhaps for two. I know not. Darkness set in. I sank on the grass, exhausted, and lay there dismayed, frantic with fear, and devoured by a sorrow capable of breaking forever the heart of a poor child. I was cold, hungry, perhaps. At length day broke. I was afraid to get up, to walk, to return home, to run farther, fearing to encounter my father, whom I did not wish to see again.

## WAITER, A BOCK

"I should probably have died of misery and of hunger at the foot of a tree if the park guard had not discovered me and led me home by force.

"I found my parents looking as usual. My mother alone spoke to me:

"How you frightened me, you naughty boy. I lay awake the whole night."

"I did not answer, but began to weep. My father did not utter a single word.

"Eight days later I returned to school.

"Well, my friend, it was all over with me. I had witnessed the other side of things, the bad side. I have not been able to perceive the good side since that day. What has taken place in my mind, what strange phenomenon has warped my ideas, I do not know. But I no longer had a taste for anything, a wish for anything, a love for anybody, a desire for anything whatever, any ambition, or any hope. And I always see my poor mother on the ground, in the park, my father beating her. My mother died some years later; my father still lives. I have not seen him since. Waiter, a bock."

A waiter brought him his bock, which he swallowed at a gulp. But, in taking up his pipe again, trembling as he was, he broke it. "Confound it!" he said, with a gesture of annoyance. "That is a real sorrow. It will take me a month to colour another!"

And he called out across the vast hall, now reeking with smoke and full of men drinking, his everlasting: "Waiter, a bock — and a new pipe."

## REGRET

MONSIEUR SAVAL, who was called in Mantes "Father Saval," had just got out of bed. He was weeping. It was a dull autumn day; the leaves were falling. They fell slowly in the rain, like a heavier and slower rain. M. Saval was not in good spirits. He walked from the fireplace to the window, and from the window to the fireplace. Life has its sombre days. It would no longer have any but sombre days for him, for he had reached the age of sixty-two. He is alone, an old bachelor, with nobody to look after him. How sad it is to die alone, all alone, without any one who is devoted to you!

He pondered over his life, so barren, so empty. He recalled former days, the days of his childhood, the home, the house of his parents; his college days, his escapades, the time he studied law in Paris, his father's illness, his death. He then returned to live with his mother. They lived together very quietly, and desired nothing more. At last the mother died. How sad life is! He had lived alone since then, and now, in his turn, he, too, will soon be dead. He will disappear, and that will be the end. There will be no more of Paul Saval upon the earth. What a frightful thing! Other people will love, will laugh. Yes, people will go on amusing themselves, and he will no longer exist! Is it not strange that people

can laugh, amuse themselves, be joyful under that eternal certainty of death? If this death were only probable, one could then have hope; but no, it is inevitable, as inevitable as that night follows the day.

If, however, his life had been full! If he had done something; if he had had adventures, great pleasures, success, satisfaction of some kind or another. But no, nothing. He had done nothing, nothing but rise from bed, eat, at the same hours, and go to bed again. And he had gone on like that to the age of sixty-two years. He had not even taken unto himself a wife, as other men do. Why? Yes, why was it that he had not married? He might have done so, for he possessed considerable means. Had he lacked an opportunity? Perhaps! But one can create opportunities. He was indifferent; that was all. Indifference had been his greatest drawback, his defect, his vice. How many men wreck their lives through indifference! It is so difficult for some natures to get out of bed, to move about, to take long walks, to speak, to study any question.

He had not even been loved. No woman had slept in his arms, in a complete abandon of love. He knew nothing of the delicious anguish of expectation, the divine vibration of a hand in yours, of the ecstasy of triumphant passion.

What superhuman happiness must overflow your heart, when lips encounter lips for the first time, when the grasp of four arms makes one being of you, a being unutterably happy, two beings infatuated with one another.

M. Saval was sitting before the fire, his feet on the fender, in his dressing gown. Assuredly his life had been a failure, a complete failure. He had, however, loved. He had loved secretly, sadly, and indifferently, in a manner characteristic of him in everything. Yes, he had loved his old friend, Madame Sandres, the wife of his old college chum Sandres. Ah! if he had known her as a young girl! But he had met her too late; she was already married. Unquestionably, he would have asked her hand! How he had loved her, nevertheless, without respite, since the first day he set eyes on her!

He recalled his emotion every time he saw her, his grief on leaving her, the many nights that he could not sleep, because he was thinking of her.

On rising in the morning he was somewhat more rational than on the previous evening.

### Why?

How pretty she was formerly, so dainty, with fair curly hair, and always laughing. Sandres was not the man she should have chosen. She was now fifty-two years of age. She seemed happy. Ah! if she had only loved him in days gone by; yes, if she had only loved him! And why should she not have loved him, Saval, seeing that he loved her, Madame Sandres, so much?

If only she could have guessed. Had she not guessed anything, seen anything, comprehended anything? What would she have thought? If he had spoken, what would she have answered?

And Saval asked himself a thousand other things. He reviewed his whole life, seeking to recall a multitude of details.

## R E G R E T

He recalled all the long evenings spent at the house of Sandres, when the latter's wife was young, and so charming.

He recalled many things that she had said to him, the intonations of her voice, the little significant smiles that meant so much.

He recalled their walks, the three of them together, along the banks of the Seine, their luncheon on the grass on Sundays, for Sandres was employed at the sub-prefecture. And all at once the distinct recollection came to him of an afternoon spent with her in a little wood on the banks of the river.

They had set out in the morning, carrying their provisions in baskets. It was a bright spring morning, one of those days which intoxicate one. Everything smells fresh, everything seems happy. The voices of the birds sound more joyous, and they fly more swiftly. They had luncheon on the grass, under the willow trees, quite close to the water, which glittered in the sun's rays. The air was balmy, charged with the odours of fresh vegetation; they drank it in with delight. How pleasant everything was on that day!

After lunch, Sandres went to sleep on the broad of his back. "The best nap he had in his life," said he, when he woke up.

Madame Sandres had taken the arm of Saval, and they started to walk along the river bank.

She leaned tenderly on his arm. She laughed and said to him: "I am intoxicated, my friend, I am quite intoxicated." He looked at her, his heart going pit-a-pat. He felt himself grow pale, fearful that he might have looked too boldly at her,

## R E G R E T

and that the trembling of his hand had revealed his passion.

She had made a wreath of wild flowers and water-lilies, and she asked him: "Do I look pretty like that?"

As he did not answer — for he could find nothing to say, he would have liked to go down on his knees — she burst out laughing, a sort of annoyed, displeased laugh, as she said: "Great goose, what ails you? You might at least say something."

He felt like crying, but could not even yet find a word to say.

All these things came back to him now, as vividly as on the day when they took place. Why had she said this to him? — "Great goose, what ails you? You might at least say something!"

And he recalled how tenderly she had leaned on his arm. And in passing under a shady tree he had felt her ear brushing his cheek, and he had moved his head abruptly, lest she should suppose he was too familiar.

When he had said to her: "Is it not time to return?" she darted a singular look at him. "Certainly," she said, "certainly," regarding him at the same time in a curious manner. He had not thought of it at the time, but now the whole thing appeared to him quite plain.

"Just as you like, my friend. If you are tired let us go back."

And he had answered: "I am not tired; but Sandres may be awake now."

And she had said: "If you are afraid of my hus-

## REGRET

band's being awake, that is another thing. Let us return."

On their way back she remained silent, and leaned no longer on his arm. Why?

At that time it had never occurred to him, to ask himself "why." Now he seemed to notice something that he had not then understood.

Could it? . . .

M. Saval felt himself blush, and he got up at a bound, as if he were thirty years younger and had heard Madame Sandres say, "I love you."

Was it possible? That idea which had just entered his mind tortured him. Was it possible that he had not seen, had not guessed?

Oh! if that were true, if he had let this opportunity of happiness pass without taking advantage of it!

He said to himself: "I must know. I cannot remain in this state of doubt. I must know!" He thought: "I am sixty-two years of age, she is fifty-eight; I may ask her that now without giving offence."

He started out.

The Sandres' house was situated on the other side of the street, almost directly opposite his own. He went across and knocked at the door, and a little servant opened it.

"You here at this hour, M. Saval! Has some accident happened to you?"

"No, my girl," he replied; "but go and tell your mistress that I want to speak to her at once."

"The fact is, madame is preserving pears for the winter, and she is in the preserving room. She is not dressed, you understand."

## R E G R E T

"Yes, but go and tell her that I wish to see her on a very important matter."

The little servant went away, and Saval began to walk, with long, nervous strides, up and down the drawing-room. He did not feel in the least embarrassed, however. Oh! he was merely going to ask her something, as he would have asked her about some cooking recipe. He was sixty-two years of age!

The door opened and madame appeared. She was now a large woman, fat and round, with full cheeks and a sonorous laugh. She walked with her arms away from her sides and her sleeves tucked up, her bare arms all covered with fruit juice. She asked anxiously:

"What is the matter with you, my friend? You are not ill, are you?"

"No, my dear friend; but I wish to ask you one thing, which to me is of the first importance, something which is torturing my heart, and I want you to promise that you will answer me frankly."

She laughed, "I am always frank. Say on."

"Well, then. I have loved you from the first day I ever saw you. Can you have any doubt of this?"

She responded, laughing, with something of her former tone of voice.

"Great goose! what ails you? I knew it from the very first day!"

Saval began to tremble. He stammered out: "You knew it? Then . . ."

He stopped.

She asked:

## REGRET

"Then? . . . What?"

He answered:

"Then — what did you think? What — what — what would you have answered?"

She broke into a peal of laughter. Some of the juice ran off the tips of her fingers on to the carpet.

"I? Why, you did not ask me anything. It was not for me to declare myself!"

He then advanced a step toward her.

"Tell me — tell me. . . . You remember the day when Sandres went to sleep on the grass after lunch . . . when we had walked together as far as the bend of the river, below . . ."

He waited, expectantly. She had ceased to laugh, and looked at him, straight in the eyes.

"Yes, certainly, I remember it."

He answered, trembling all over:

"Well — that day — if I had been — if I had been — venturesome — what would you have done?"

She began to laugh as only a happy woman can laugh, who has nothing to regret, and responded frankly, in a clear voice tinged with irony:

"I would have yielded, my friend."

She then turned on her heels and went back to her jam-making.

Saval rushed into the street, cast down, as though he had met with some disaster. He walked with giant strides through the rain, straight on, until he reached the river bank, without thinking where he was going. He then turned to the right and followed the river. He walked a long time, as if urged on by some instinct. His clothes were running with water, his hat was out of shape, as soft as a rag,

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and dripping like a roof. He walked on, straight in front of him. At last, he came to the place where they had lunched on that day so long ago, the recollection of which tortured his heart. He sat down under the leafless trees, and wept.

## MY UNCLE JULES

A POOR old man with white hair begged us for alms. My companion, Joseph Davranche, gave him five francs. Noticing my surprised look, he said:

"That poor unfortunate reminds me of a story which I shall tell you, the memory of which continually pursues me. Here it is:

"My family, which came originally from Havre, was not rich. We just managed to make both ends meet. My father worked hard, came home late from the office, and earned very little. I had two sisters.

"My mother suffered a good deal from our reduced circumstances, and she often had harsh words for her husband, veiled and sly reproaches. The poor man then made a gesture which used to distress me. He would pass his open hand over his forehead, as if to wipe away perspiration which did not exist, and he would answer nothing. I felt his helpless suffering. We economized on everything and never would accept an invitation to dinner, so as not to have to return the courtesy. All our provisions were bought at reduced prices, whatever was left over in the shops. My sisters made their own gowns, and long discussions would arise on the price of a piece of braid worth fifteen centimes a yard. Our meals usually consisted of soup and beef pre-

## MY UNCLE JULES

pared with every kind of sauce. They say it is wholesome and nourishing, but I should have preferred a change.

"I used to go through terrible scenes on account of lost buttons and torn trousers.

"Every Sunday, dressed in our best, we would take our walk along the pier. My father, in a frock coat, high hat and kid gloves, would offer his arm to my mother, decked out and beribboned like a ship on a holiday. My sisters, who were always ready first, would await the signal for leaving; but at the last minute some one always found a spot on my father's frock coat, and it had to be wiped away quickly with a rag moistened with benzine.

"My father, in his shirt sleeves, his silk hat on his head, would await the completion of the operation, while my mother would make haste, putting on her spectacles, and taking off her gloves in order not to spoil them.

"Then we set out ceremoniously. My sisters marched on ahead, arm in arm. They were of marriageable age and had to be shown off. I walked on the left of my mother and my father on her right. I remember the pompous air of my poor parents in these Sunday walks, their stern expression, their stiff walk. They moved slowly, with a serious expression, their bodies straight, their legs stiff, as if something of extreme importance depended upon their appearance.

"Every Sunday, when the big steamers were returning from unknown and distant countries, my father would invariably utter the same words:

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“‘What a surprise it would be if Jules were on that one! Eh?’

“My Uncle Jules, my father’s brother, was the only hope of the family, after being its only fear. I had heard about him since childhood, and it seemed to me that I should recognize him immediately, knowing as much about him as I did. I knew every detail of his life up to the day of his departure for America, although this period of his life was spoken of only in hushed tones.

“It seems that he had led a bad life, that is to say, he had squandered a little money, which action, in a poor family, is one of the greatest crimes. With rich people a man who amuses himself only sows his wild oats. He is what is generally called a sport. But among needy families a boy who forces his parents to break into the capital becomes a good-for-nothing, a rascal, a scamp. And this distinction is just, although the action be the same, for consequences alone determine the seriousness of the act.

“Well, Uncle Jules had visibly diminished the inheritance on which my father had counted, after he had swallowed his own to the last penny. Then, according to the custom of the times, he had been shipped off to America on a freighter going from Havre to New York.

“Once there, my uncle began to sell something or other, and he soon wrote that he was making a little money and that he shortly hoped to be able to indemnify my father for the harm he had done him. This letter caused a profound emotion in the family. Jules, who up to that time had not been worth his

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salt, suddenly became a good man, a kind-hearted fellow, true and honest like all the Davranches.

"One of the captains told us that he had rented a large shop and was doing an important business.

"Two years later a second letter came, saying: 'My dear Philippe, I am writing to tell you not to worry about my health, which is excellent. Business is good. I leave to-morrow for a long trip to South America. I may be away for several years without sending you any news. If I shouldn't write, don't worry. When my fortune is made I shall return to Havre. I hope that it will not be too long, and that we shall all live happily together. . . .'

"This letter became the gospel of the family. It was read on the slightest provocation, and it was shown to everybody.

"For ten years nothing was heard from Uncle Jules; but as time went on my father's hope grew, and my mother, also, often said:

"'When that good Jules is here, our position will be different. There is one who knew how to get along!'

"And every Sunday, while watching the big steamers approaching from the horizon, pouring out a stream of smoke, my father would repeat his eternal question:

"'What a surprise it would be if Jules were on that one! Eh?'

"We almost expected to see him waving his handkerchief and crying:

"'Hey! Philippe!'

"Thousands of schemes had been planned on the strength of this expected return; we were even to

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buy a little house with my uncle's money — a little place in the country near Ingouville. In fact, I wouldn't swear that my father had not already begun negotiations.

"The elder of my sisters was then twenty-eight, the other twenty-six. They were not yet married, and that was a great grief to everyone.

"At last a suitor presented himself for the younger one. He was a clerk, not rich, but honorable. I have always been morally certain that Uncle Jules' letter, which was shown him one evening, had swept away the young man's hesitation and definitely decided him.

"He was eagerly accepted, and it was decided that after the wedding the whole family should take a trip to Jersey.

"Jersey is the ideal trip for poor people. It is not far; one crosses a strip of sea in a steamer and lands on foreign soil, as this little island belongs to England. Thus, a Frenchman, in a two hours' sail, can observe a neighbouring people at home and study their customs.

"This trip to Jersey completely absorbed our ideas, was our sole anticipation, the constant thought of our minds.

"At last we left. I see it as plainly as if it had happened yesterday. The boat was getting up steam against the quay at Granville; my father, bewildered, was superintending the loading of our three pieces of baggage; my mother, nervous, had taken the arm of my unmarried sister, who seemed lost since the departure of the other one, like the last chicken of a brood; behind us came the bride

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and groom, who always stayed behind, a thing that often made me turn round.

"The whistle sounded. We got on board, and the vessel, leaving the pier, forged ahead through a sea as flat as a marble table. We watched the coast disappear in the distance, happy and proud, like all who do not travel much.

"My father was swelling out his chest in the breeze, beneath his frock coat, which had that morning been very carefully cleaned; and he spread around him that odour of benzine which always made me recognize Sunday. Suddenly he noticed two elegantly dressed ladies to whom two gentlemen were offering oysters. An old, ragged sailor was opening them with his knife and passing them to the gentlemen, who would then offer them to the ladies. They ate them in a dainty manner, holding the shell on a fine handkerchief and advancing their mouths a little in order not to spot their dresses. Then they would drink the liquid with a rapid little motion and throw the shell overboard.

"My father was probably pleased with this delicate manner of eating oysters on a moving ship. He considered it good form, refined, and, going up to my mother and sisters, he asked:

"Would you like me to offer you some oysters?"

"My mother hesitated on account of the expense, but my two sisters immediately accepted. My mother said in a provoked manner:

"I am afraid that they will hurt my stomach. Offer the children some, but not too much, it would make them sick." Then, turning toward me, she added:

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"As for Joseph, he doesn't need any. Boys shouldn't be spoiled."

"However, I remained beside my mother, finding this discrimination unjust. I watched my father as he pompously conducted my two sisters and his son-in-law toward the ragged old sailor.

"The two ladies had just left, and my father showed my sisters how to eat them without spilling the liquor. He even tried to give them an example, and seized an oyster. He attempted to imitate the ladies, and immediately spilled all the liquid over his coat. I heard my mother mutter:

"He would do far better to keep quiet."

"But, suddenly, my father appeared to be worried; he retreated a few steps, stared at his family gathered around the old shell opener, and quickly came toward us. He seemed very pale, with a peculiar look. In a low voice he said to my mother:

"It's extraordinary how that man opening the oysters looks like Jules."

"Astonished, my mother asked:

"What Jules?"

"My father continued:

"Why, my brother. If I did not know that he was well off in America, I should think it was he."

"Bewildered, my mother stammered:

"You are mad! As long as you know that it is not he, why do you say such foolish things?"

"But my father insisted:

"Go on over and see, Clarisse! I would rather have you see with your own eyes."

"She arose and walked to her daughters. I, too,

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was watching the man. He was old, dirty, wrinkled, and did not lift his eyes from his work.

"My mother returned. I noticed that she was trembling. She exclaimed quickly:

"I believe that it is he. Why don't you ask the captain? But be very careful that we don't have this rogue on our hands again!"

"My father walked away, but I followed him. I felt strangely moved.

The captain, a tall, thin man, with blond whiskers, was walking along the bridge with an important air as if he were commanding the Indian mail steamer.

"My father addressed him ceremoniously, and questioned him about his profession, adding many compliments:

"What might be the importance of Jersey? What did it produce? What was the population? The customs? The nature of the soil?" etc., etc.

"You have there an old shell opener who seems quite interesting. Do you know anything about him?"

"The captain, whom this conversation began to weary, answered dryly:

"He is some old French tramp whom I found last year in America, and I brought him back. It seems that he has some relatives in Havre, but that he doesn't wish to return to them because he owes them money. His name is Jules — Jules Darmanche or Darvanche or something like that. It seems that he was once rich over there, but you can see what's left of him now."

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"My father turned ashy pale and muttered, his throat contracted, his eyes haggard:

"Ah! ah! very well, very well. I'm not in the least surprised. Thank you very much, captain."

"He went away, and the astonished sailor watched him disappear. He returned to my mother so upset that she said to him:

"Sit down; some one will notice that something is the matter."

"He sank down on a bench and stammered:

"It's he! It's he!"

"Then he asked:

"What are we going to do?"

"She answered quickly:

"We must get the children out of the way. Since Joseph knows everything, he can go and get them. We must take good care that our son-in-law doesn't find out."

"My father seemed absolutely bewildered. He murmured:

"What a catastrophe!"

"Suddenly growing furious, my mother exclaimed:

"I always thought that that thief never would do anything, and that he would drop down on us again! As if one could expect anything from a Davranche!"

"My father passed his hand over his forehead, as he always did when his wife reproached him. She added:

"Give Joseph some money so that he can pay for the oysters. All that it needed to cap the climax would be to be recognized by that beggar. That would be very pleasant! Let's go down to the

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other end of the boat, and take care that that man doesn't come near us!"

"They gave me five francs and walked away.

"Astonished, my sisters were awaiting their father. I said that mamma had felt a sudden attack of sea-sickness, and I asked the shell opener:

"How much do we owe you, monsieur?"

"I felt like laughing: he was my uncle! He answered:

"Two francs fifty."

"I held out my five francs and he returned the change. I looked at his hand; it was a poor, wrinkled, sailor's hand, and I looked at his face, an unhappy old face. I said to myself:

"That is my uncle, the brother of my father, my uncle!"

"I gave him a tip of one franc. He thanked me:

"God bless you, my young sir!"

"He spoke like a poor man receiving alms. I couldn't help thinking that he must have begged over there! My sisters looked at me, surprised at my generosity. When I returned the two francs to my father, my mother asked me in surprise:

"Was there three francs' worth? That is impossible."

"I answered in a firm voice:

"I gave ten sous as a tip."

"My mother started, and, staring at me, she exclaimed:

"You must be crazy! Give ten sous to that man, to that vagabond —"

"She stopped at a look from my father, who

## MY UNCLE JULES

was pointing at his son-in-law. Then everybody was silent.

"Before us, on the distant horizon, a purple shadow seemed to rise out of the sea. It was Jersey.

"As we approached the breakwater a violent desire seized me once more to see my Uncle Jules, to be near him, to say to him something consoling, something tender. But as no one was eating any more oysters, he had disappeared, having probably gone below to the dirty hold which was the home of the poor wretch."

## ON THE JOURNEY

### I

THE railway carriage was full as we left Cannes. We were chatting, for everybody was acquainted. As we passed Tarascon some one remarked: "Here's the place where they assassinate people."

And we began to talk of the mysterious and untraceable murderer, who for the last two years had taken, from time to time, the life of a traveller. Everyone made his guess, everyone gave his opinion; the women shudderingly gazed at the dark night through the car windows, fearing suddenly to see a man's head at the door. We all began telling frightful stories of terrible encounters, meetings with madmen in a flying-express, of hours passed opposite a suspected individual.

Each man knew an anecdote to his credit, each one had intimidated, overpowered, and throttled some evildoer in most surprising circumstances, with an admirable presence of mind and audacity.

A physician, who spent every winter in the south, desired, in his turn, to tell an adventure:

"I," said he, "never have had the luck to test my courage in an affair of this kind; but I knew a woman, now dead, one of my patients, to whom the most singular thing in the world happened, and also the most mysterious and pathetic.

## ON THE JOURNEY

"She was Russian, the Comtesse Marie Baranow, a very great lady, of exquisite beauty. You know how beautiful Russian women are, or at least how beautiful they seem to us, with their fine noses, their delicate mouths, their eyes of an indescribable colour, a blue grey, and their cold grace, a little hard! They have something about them, mischievous and seductive, haughty and sweet, tender and severe, altogether charming to a Frenchman. At the bottom, it is, perhaps, the difference of race and of type which makes me see so much in them.

"Her physician had seen for many years that she was threatened with a disease of the lungs, and had tried to persuade her to come to the south of France; but she obstinately refused to leave St. Petersburg. Finally, last autumn, deeming her lost, the doctor warned her husband, who directed his wife to start at once for Mentone.

"She took the train, alone in her car, her servants occupying another compartment. She sat by the door, a little sad, seeing the fields and villages pass, feeling very lonely, very desolate in life, without children, almost without relatives, with a husband whose love was dead and who cast her thus to the end of the world without coming with her, as they send a sick valet to the hospital.

"At each station her servant Ivan came to see if his mistress wanted anything. He was an old domestic, blindly devoted, ready to execute any order she might give him.

"Night fell, and the train rolled along at full speed. She could not sleep, being wearied and nervous.

## ON THE JOURNEY

"Suddenly the thought struck her to count the money which her husband had given her at the last minute, in French gold. She opened her little bag and emptied the shining flood of metal on her lap.

"But all at once a breath of cold air struck her face. Surprised, she raised her head. The door had just opened. The Comtesse Marie, in terror, hastily threw a shawl over the money spread upon her lap, and waited. Some seconds passed, then a man in evening dress appeared, bareheaded, wounded on the hand, and panting. He closed the door, sat down, looked at his neighbor with gleaming eyes, and then wrapped a handkerchief around his wrist, which was bleeding.

"The young woman felt herself fainting with fear. This man, surely, had seen her counting her money and had come to rob and kill her.

"He kept gazing at her, breathless, his features convulsed, doubtless ready to spring upon her.

"He suddenly said:

"'Madame, don't be afraid!'

"She made no response, being incapable of opening her mouth, hearing her heartbeats, and a buzzing in her ears.

"He continued:

"'I am not a criminal, Madame.'

"She continued to be silent, but by a sudden movement which she made, her knees meeting, the gold coins began to run to the floor as water runs from a spout.

"The man, surprised, looked at this stream of metal, and he suddenly stooped to pick it up.

"Terrified, she rose, casting her whole fortune on

## ON THE JOURNEY

the carpet and ran to the door to leap out on to the track.

“But he understood what she was going to do, and springing forward, seized her in his arms, seated her by force, and held her by the wrists.

“‘Listen to me, Madame,’ said he, ‘I am not a criminal; the proof of it is that I am going to gather up this gold and return it to you. But I am a lost man, a dead man, if you do not assist me to pass the frontier. I cannot tell you more. In an hour we shall be at the last Russian station; in an hour and twenty minutes we shall cross the boundary of the Empire. If you do not help me I am lost. And yet I have neither killed anyone, nor robbed, nor done anything contrary to honour. This I swear to you. I cannot tell you more.’

“And kneeling down he picked up the gold, even hunting under the seats for the last coins, which had rolled to a distance. Then, when the little leather bag was full again he gave it to his neighbour without saying a word, and returned to seat himself in the other corner of the compartment. Neither of them moved. She kept motionless and silent, still faint from terror, but gradually growing quieter. As for him, he did not make a gesture or a motion, but remained sitting erect, his eyes staring in front of him, very pale, as if he were dead. From time to time she threw a quick look at him, and as quickly turned her glance away. He appeared to be about thirty years of age, and was very handsome, with the air of a gentleman.

“The train ran through the darkness, giving at intervals its shrill signals, now slowing up in its

## ON THE JOURNEY

progress, and again starting off at full speed. But suddenly its progress slackened, and after several sharp whistles it came to a full stop.

“Ivan appeared at the door for his orders.

“The Comtesse Marie, her voice trembling, gave one last look at her companion; then she said to her servant, in a quick tone:

“‘Ivan, you will return to the Comte; I do not need you any longer.’

“The man, bewildered, opened his enormous eyes. He stammered:

“‘But, my lady — ’

“She replied:

“‘No, you will not come with me; I have changed my mind. I wish you to stay in Russia. Here is some money for your return home. Give me your cap and cloak.’

“The old servant, frightened, took off his cap and cloak, obeying without question, accustomed to the sudden whims and caprices of his masters. And he went away, with tears in his eyes.

“The train started again, rushing toward the frontier.

“Then the Comtesse Marie said to her neighbour:

“‘These things are for you, Monsieur, — you are Ivan, my servant. I make only one condition to what I am doing: that is, that you shall not speak a word to me, neither to thank me, nor for anything whatsoever.’

“The unknown bowed without uttering a syllable.

“Soon the train stopped again, and officers in uniform visited the train.

“The Comtesse handed them her papers and,

## ON THE JOURNEY

pointing to the man seated at the end of the compartment, said:

“That is my servant Ivan, whose passport is here.”

“The train again started.

“During the night they sat opposite each other, both silent.

“When morning came, as they stopped at a German station, the unknown man got out; then, standing at the door, he said:

“Pardon me, Madame, for breaking my promise, but as I have deprived you of a servant, it is proper that I should replace him. Have you need of anything?”

“She replied coldly:

“Go and find my maid.”

“He went to summon her. Then he disappeared.

“When she alighted at some station for luncheon she saw him at a distance looking at her. They finally arrived at Mentone.”

## II

The doctor was silent for a second, and then resumed:

“One day, while I was receiving patients in my office, a tall young man entered. He said to me:

“Doctor, I have come to ask you news of the Comtesse Marie Baranow. I am a friend of her husband, although she does not know me.”

“I answered:

“She is lost. She will never return to Russia.”

“And suddenly this man began to sob, then

## ON THE JOURNEY

he rose and went out, staggering like a drunken man.

"I told the Comtesse that evening that a stranger had come to make inquiries about her health. She seemed moved, and told me the story which I have just related to you. She added:

"That man, whom I do not know at all, follows me now like my shadow. I meet him every time I go out. He looks at me in a strange way, but he has never spoken to me!"

"She pondered a moment, then added:

"Come, I'll wager that he is under the window now."

"She left her reclining-chair, went to the window and drew back the curtain, and actually showed me the man who had come to see me, seated on a bench at the edge of the side wall with his eyes raised toward the house. He perceived us, rose, and went away without once turning around.

"Then I understood a sad and surprising thing, the silent love of these two beings, who were not acquainted with each other.

"He loved her with the devotion of a rescued animal, grateful and devoted to the death. He came every day to ask me, 'How is she?' understanding that I had guessed his feelings. And he wept frightfully when he saw her pass, weaker and paler every day.

"She said to me:

"I have never spoken but once to that singular man, and yet it seems as if I had known him for twenty years."

"And when they met she returned his bow with

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a serious and charming smile. I felt that — although she was given up, and knew herself lost — she was happy to be loved thus, with this respect and constancy, with this exaggerated poetry, with this devotion, ready for anything.

"Nevertheless, faithful to her superexcited obstinacy, she absolutely refused to learn his name, to speak to him. She said:

"No, no, that would spoil this strange friendship. We must remain strangers to each other."

"As for him, he was certainly a kind of Don Quixote, for he did nothing to bring himself closer to her. He intended to keep to the end the absurd promise never to speak to her which he had made in the railway carriage.

"Often, during her long hours of weakness, she rose from her reclining-chair and partly opened the curtain to see whether he were there, beneath the window. When she had seen him, always motionless upon his bench, she went back and lay down with a smile upon her lips.

"She died one day about ten o'clock. As I was leaving the hotel he came up to me with a distracted face; he had already heard the news.

"I should like to see her, for one second, in your presence," said he.

"I took him by the arm and went back into the house.

"When he was beside the couch of the dead woman he seized her hand and kissed it long and tenderly and then fled away like a madman."

The doctor again was silent, then continued:

## ON THE JOURNEY

"This is certainly the strangest railway adventure that I know. It must also be said that men sometimes do the maddest things."

A woman murmured, half aloud:

"Those two people were not so crazy as you think. They were — they were —"

But she could not continue, she was crying so. As we changed the conversation to calm her, we never knew what she had wished to say.

## MOTHER SAVAGE

### I

I HAD not returned to Virelogne for fifteen years. I went back there to hunt in the autumn, staying with my friend Serval, who had finally rebuilt his château, which had been destroyed by the Prussians.

I was infinitely fond of that country. There are delicious corners in this world which have a sensual charm for the eyes. One loves them with a physical love. We folk whom nature attracts, keep certain tender recollections, often keen, for certain springs, certain woods, certain ponds, certain hills, which have touched us like happy events. Sometimes even memory returns toward a forest nook, or a bit of a river bank, or a blossoming orchard, seen only once, on some happy day, which has remained in our heart like those pictures of women seen in the street, on a spring morning, with a white, transparent costume, and which leave in our soul and flesh an unappeased, unforgettable desire, the sensation of having just missed happiness.

At Virelogne, I loved the whole region, sowed with little woods, and traversed by brooks which ran through the soil like veins bringing blood to the earth.

We fished in them for crayfish, trout, and eels! Divine happiness! We could bathe in certain

## MOTHER SAVAGE

places and often found woodcock in the tall grass which grew on the banks of those little narrow streams.

I went, light as a goat, watching my two dogs forage in front of me. Serval, a hundred yards away, on my right, was beating up a field of lucerne. I went around the thickets which formed the boundaries of the Sandres forest, and I perceived a hut in ruins.

Suddenly I recollect that I had seen it for the last time in 1869, neat, vine-clad, with chickens before the door. What is sadder than a dead house with its skeleton standing, dilapidated and sinister?

I recalled also that a woman had given me a glass of wine there, on a day when I was very tired, and that Serval had then told me the story of the inhabitants. The father, an old poacher, had been killed by the gendarmes. The son, whom I had seen before, was a tall, wizened lad who was likewise considered a ferocious killer of game. People called them the Savage family.

Was it a name or a nickname? I hailed Serval. He came with his long stride, as if he were walking on stilts.

I asked him: "What has become of those people?" And he told me this adventure.

### II

"When war was declared, the younger Savage, who was then about thirty-three years old, enlisted, leaving his mother alone in the house. People did

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not pity the old woman very much, because they knew that she had money.

"So she stayed all alone in this isolated house, so far from the village, on the edge of the woods. She was not afraid, however, being of the same race as her men, a strong, tall, thin, old woman, who seldom laughed, and with whom no one joked. The women of the fields do not laugh much, anyway. That is the men's business! They have a sad and narrow soul, leading a life which is gloomy and without bright spots.

"The peasant learns a little of the noisy gaiety of the pothouse, but his wife remains serious, with a constantly severe expression of countenance. The muscles of her face never learn the motions of laughter.

"Mother Savage continued her usual existence in her hut, which was soon covered with snow. She came to the village once a week to get bread and a little meat: then she returned to her cottage. As people spoke of wolves, she carried a gun on her shoulder, her son's gun, rusty, with the stock worn by the rubbing of the hand. She was a curious sight, this tall Savage woman, a little bent, walking with slow strides through the snow, the barrel of the weapon extending beyond the black headdress, which imprisoned the white hair that no one had ever seen.

"One day the Prussians arrived. They were distributed among the inhabitants according to the means and resources of each. The old woman, who was known to be rich, had four soldiers billeted upon her.

"They were four big young men with fair flesh,

## MOTHER SAVAGE

fair beard, and blue eyes, who had remained stout in spite of the fatigues they had endured, and good fellows even if they were in a conquered territory. Alone with this old woman, they showed themselves full of consideration for her, sparing her fatigue and expense as far as they could do so. All four might have been seen making their toilette at the well in the morning, in their shirt-sleeves, splashing their pink and white flesh, the flesh of the men of the north, in the water, on cold snowy days, while Mother Savage came and went preparing their soup. Then they might have been observed cleaning the kitchen, polishing the floor, chopping wood, peeling potatoes, washing the clothes, doing all the household duties, like four good sons around their mother.

"But she thought continually of her own son, the old mother, of her tall, thin boy with his crooked nose, brown eyes, and stiff moustache which made a cushion of black hair on his upper lip. She asked each of the soldiers installed at her hearth:

"Do you know where the French regiment has gone, the Twenty-third Infantry? My boy is in it."

"They answered: 'No, we don't know anything at all about it.'

"And understanding her grief and worry they, who had mothers at home, rendered her a thousand little services.

"She liked them very well, moreover, her four enemies: for peasants seldom have patriotic hatreds: that is the business of the superior classes. The humble, those who pay the most because they are poor, and because every new burden rests upon them,

## MOTHER SAVAGE

those who are killed in masses, who form the true cannon fodder because they are numerous, those who, in a word, suffer most cruelly the atrocious miseries of the poor, because they are the weakest and the most unresisting, understand little of those bellicose ardours, the excitable points of honour and those pretended political combinations which exhaust two nations in six months, the victorious as well as the vanquished.

“They said in the country, speaking of Mother Savage’s Germans: ‘There are four who have found a snug berth.’

“Now, one morning, as the old woman was alone in the house, she perceived afar off on the plain a man coming toward her home. Soon she recognized him: it was the postman, charged with distributing letters. He handed her a folded paper, and she drew from their case her spectacles which she used for sewing, and read:

“‘Madame Savage, this is to give you sad news. Your son Victor was killed by a cannon-ball yesterday, which virtually cut him in two. I was very near, as we were side by side in the company and he had asked me to tell you the same day if anything happened to him.

“‘I took his watch from his pocket to bring it to you when the war is finished.

“‘I remain your friend,

“‘CÉSAIRE RIVOT.

“‘Soldier of the 2d Class, in the 23d infantry.’

“The letter was dated three weeks back.

“She did not weep. She stood motionless, so astounded that she did not yet suffer.

## MOTHER SAVAGE

"She thought: 'Victor is killed!'

"Then little by little the tears came to her eyes and grief overwhelmed her heart. Ideas came to her one by one, frightful, torturing ideas. She would never kiss him again, her big boy, never again. The gendarmes had killed the father, the Prussians had killed the son. He had been cut in two by a cannon-ball. And it seemed to her that she saw the thing, the horrible thing: the head falling, the eyes open, while he gnawed the end of his big moustache, as he did in moments of anger.

"What had they done with his body afterwards? If they had only sent her boy back to her, as they had her husband, with a bullet in his forehead.

"But she heard a sound of voices. It was the Prussians, who were returning from the village. She quickly hid the letter in her pocket, and received them tranquilly, with her ordinary expression on her face, having had time to wipe her eyes.

"They were all four laughing, delighted, for they were bringing back a fine rabbit, stolen no doubt, and they made a sign to the old woman that they were going to have something good to eat.

"She applied herself at once to the duties of preparing the breakfast; but when it came to killing the rabbit, her heart failed her. And yet it was not the first. One of the soldiers killed it with a blow behind the ears.

"Once the animal was dead, she took the red body out of the skin; but the sight of the blood which she touched, which covered her hands, of the warm blood which she felt getting cold and coagu-

## MOTHER SAVAGE

lating, made her tremble from head to foot; and she kept seeing her tall boy cut in two and all bleeding, like this still palpitating animal.

"She sat at the table with her Prussians, but she could not eat, not even a mouthful. They devoured the rabbit without troubling about her. She looked at them aside without speaking, nursing an idea, with her countenance so impassive that they perceived nothing.

"Suddenly she said: 'I don't even know your names, and it is a month since we have been together.' They understood, not without difficulty, what she wished and gave her their names. That was not enough, she made them write them for her on a piece of paper, with the address of their families, and resting her spectacles on her large nose she scanned this unknown handwriting, then she folded the sheet and put it in her pocket, with the letter which told of the death of her son.

"When the meal was finished, she said to the men:  
"I am going to work for you."

"And she began to carry straw to the garret in which they slept.

"They were astonished at this act. She explained to them that they would be less cold; and they assisted her. They piled the bundles of straw up to the roof, and thus they made for themselves a sort of big room with four walls of forage, warm and sweet-smelling, where they would sleep wonderfully.

"At dinner one of them was disturbed to see that Mother Savage did not eat anything. She asserted that she had cramps. Then she lighted a good fire to warm herself, and the four Germans climbed

## MOTHER SAVAGE

to their lodging by the ladder which they used every evening.

"As soon as the trapdoor was closed, the old woman took away the ladder, then she noiselessly opened the outside door and returned to get more bundles of straw, with which she filled the kitchen. She went out barefooted in the snow, so softly that the men heard nothing. From time to time she listened to the deep and uneven snores of the four sleeping soldiers. When she thought her preparations were sufficient, she threw into the fire one of the bundles of straw, and when it had ignited she piled it on the others, and then went out again and looked.

"A brilliant light illuminated in a few seconds all the interior of the cottage; then it became a frightful brazier, a gigantic, glowing furnace, whose gleams shone through the narrow window and cast a dazzling light upon the snow.

"Then a great cry came from the top of the house; there was a clamour of human shrieks, of heartrending appeals of anguish and terror. Then, the trapdoor having sunk down into the interior, a whirlwind of fire leaped through the attic, pierced the thatched roof, and ascended to the sky like the flame of a great torch; and the whole cottage was burning.

"Nothing more was heard inside but the crackling of the flames, the crumbling of the walls, and the crashing of the beams. The roof suddenly fell in, and the glowing remnant of the house shot up into the air, amid a cloud of smoke, a great fountain of sparks.

"The white field, lighted up by the fire, glistened like a cloth of silver tinted with red.

"A bell in the distance began to ring. The old Savage woman stood erect before her ruined home, armed with a gun, her son's, for fear one of the men should escape.

"When she saw that her work was finished, she threw the weapon in the fire. A report rang out.

"The people arrived, peasants and Prussians.

"They found the woman sitting on the trunk of a tree, tranquil and satisfied.

"A German officer who could speak French like a Frenchman, asked her:

"Where are the soldiers?"

"She stretched her thin arm toward the red mass of flames, which were now dying down, and answered in a strong voice:

"They are in there!"

"All pressed around her. The Prussian asked:

"How did the fire start?"

"She replied:

"I set the house on fire."

"They did not believe her, thinking that the sudden disaster had made her mad. Then, as everybody gathered around and listened, she related the whole thing from beginning to end, the arrival of the letter to the last cry of the men, burning up with the house. She did not forget a single detail of what she had felt nor what she had done.

"When she had finished she drew two papers from her pocket, and, to distinguish them in the last gleams of the fire, she again put on her spectacles. Then she said, showing one of them: 'This is the

## MOTHER SAVAGE

death of Victor.' Showing the other, she added, nodding her head toward the red ruins: 'And this is the list of their names, so that some one may write the news home about them.'

"She quietly handed the white sheet to the officer, who took her by the shoulders, and she resumed:

"'You will write how it happened, and you will tell their relatives that it was I who did it, Victoire Simon, the Savage; don't forget.'

"The officer shouted some orders in German, to the soldiers; they seized her, and threw her against the still heated walls of the house. Then a squad of twelve men drew up in a rank opposite her, at a distance of twenty yards. She did not stir. She had understood. She waited.

"An order resounded, which was followed by a long report of muskets. One delayed shot went off all alone, after the others.

"The old woman did not fall. She sank down as if some one had mowed off her legs.

"The Prussian officer approached. She was cut almost in two, and in her shriveled hand she held her letter, bathed in blood."

My friend Serval added.

"It was by way of reprisal that the Germans destroyed the château of the district, which belonged to me."

I thought of the mothers of the poor gentle young fellows burned there; and of the atrocious heroism of that other mother, shot against the wall.

And I picked up a little pebble, still blackened by the fire.

## THE ORIENT

AUTUMN is here! When I feel the first touch of winter I always think of my friend who lives down yonder on the Asiatic frontier.

The last time I entered his house I knew that I should not see him again. It was towards the end of September, three years ago. I found him stretched out on his divan, dreaming under the influence of opium. Holding out his hand to me without moving, he said:

"Stay here. Talk and I will answer you, but I shall not move, for you know that when once the drug has been swallowed you must stay on your back."

I sat down and began to tell him a thousand things about Paris and the boulevards.

But he interrupted me.

"What you are saying does not interest me in the least, for I am thinking only of countries under other skies. Oh, how poor Gautier must have suffered, always haunted by the longing for the Orient! You don't know what that means, how that country takes hold of you, how it captivates you, penetrates you to your inmost being and will not let you go. It enters into you through the eye, through the skin, all its invisible seductions, and it holds you by an invisible thread, which is unceasingly pulling you, in whatever spot on earth chance may have flung

## THE ORIENT

you. I take the drug in order to muse on that land in the delicious torpor of opium."

He stopped and closed his eyes.

"What makes it so pleasant to you to take this poison?" I asked. "What physical joy does it give, that people take it until it kills them?"

"It is not a physical joy," he replied; "it is better than that, it is more. I am often sad; I detest life, which wounds me every day on all sides, with all its angles, its hardships. Opium consoles for everything, makes one resigned to everything. Do you know that state of mind that I might call gnawing irritation? I ordinarily live in that state. And there are two things that can cure me of it: opium or the Orient. As soon as I have taken opium I lie down and wait, perhaps one hour and sometimes two. Then, when it begins to take effect I feel first a slight trembling in the hands and feet, not a cramp, but a vibrant numbness; then little by little I have the strange and delicious sensation of feeling my limbs disappear. It seems to me as if they were taken off, and this feeling grows upon me until it fills me completely. I have no longer any body; I retain merely a kind of pleasant memory of it. Only my head is there, and it works. I dream. I think with an infinite, material joy, with unequalled lucidity, with a surprising penetration. I reason, I deduce, I understand everything. I discover ideas that never before have come to me; I descend to new depths and mount to marvellous heights; I float in an ocean of thought, and I taste the incomparable happiness, the ideal enjoyment of the chaste and serene intoxication of pure intelligence."

Again he stopped and closed his eyes. I said: "Your longing for the Orient is due only to this constant intoxication. You are living in a state of hallucination. How can one long for that barbarous country, where the mind is dead, where the sterile imagination does not go beyond the narrow limits of life and makes no effort to take flight, to expand and conquer?"

"What does practical thought matter?" he replied. "What I love is dreaming. That only is good, and that only is sweet. Implacable reality would lead me to suicide, if dreaming did not permit me to wait.

"You say that the Orient is the land of barbarians. Stop, wretched man! It is the country of the sages, the hot country where one lets life flow by, where angles are rounded.

"We are the barbarians, we men of the West who call ourselves civilized; we are hateful barbarians who live a painful life, like brutes.

"Look at our cities built of stone and our furniture made of hard and knotty wood. We mount, panting, a high, narrow stairway, to go into stuffy apartments into which the cold wind comes whistling, only to escape immediately again through a chimney which creates deadly currents of air that are strong enough to turn a windmill. Our chairs are hard, our walls cold and covered with ugly paper; everywhere we are wounded by angles—angles on our tables, on our mantels, on our doors and on our beds. We live standing up or sitting in our chairs, but we never lie down except to sleep, which is ridiculous, for in sleeping you are not con-

## THE ORIENT

scious of the happiness there is in being stretched out flat.

"And then to think of our intellectual life! It is filled with incessant struggle and strife. Worry hovers over us and preoccupations pester us; we no longer have time to seek and pursue the two or three good things within our reach.

"It is war to the finish. And our character, even more than our furniture, is full of angles — angles everywhere.

"We are hardly out of bed when we hasten to our work, in rain or snow. We fight against rivals, competition, hostility. Every man is an enemy whom we must fear and overcome and with whom we must resort to ruse. Even love has with us its aspects of victory and defeat: that also is a struggle."

He reflected for some moments and then continued:

"I know the house that I am going to buy. It is square, with a flat roof and wooden trimmings, in the Oriental fashion. From the terrace you can see the sea, where white sails like pointed wings are passing, and Greek or Turkish vessels. There are hardly any openings on the outside walls. A large garden, where the air is heavy under the shadow of palms, is in the center of this abode. A jet of water rises from under the trees and falls in spray into a large marble basin, the bottom of which is covered with golden sand. I shall bathe there at any hour of the day, between two pipes, two dreams, two kisses.

"I will not have any servant, any hideous maid

with greasy apron, who kicks up the dirty bottom of her skirt with her worn shoes. Oh, that kick of the heel which shows the yellow ankle! It fills my heart with disgust, and yet I cannot avoid it. Those wretches all do it.

“I shall no longer hear the tramping of shoes on the floor, the loud slamming of doors, the crash of breaking dishes.

“I will have beautiful black slaves, draped in white veils, who run barefoot over heavy carpets.

“My walls shall be soft and rounded, like a woman’s breasts; and my divans, ranged in a circle around each apartment, shall be heaped with cushions of all shapes, so that I may lie down in all possible postures.

“Then, when I am tired of this delicious repose, tired of enjoying immobility and my eternal dream, tired of the calm pleasure of well-being, I shall have a swift black or white horse brought to my door.

“And I shall ride away on it, drinking in the air which stings and intoxicates, the air that whistles when one is galloping furiously.

“And I shall fly like an arrow over this coloured earth, which intoxicates the eye with the effect of the flavour of wine.

“In the calm of the evening I shall ride madly toward the wide horizon, which is tinged rose-colour by the setting sun. Everything is rosy down there in the twilight, the scorched mountains, the sand, the clothing of the Arabs, the white coat of the horses.

“Pink flamingoes rise out of the marshes under

the pink sky, and I shall shout deliriously, bathed in the illimitable rosiness of the world.

"I shall no longer see men dressed in black, sitting on uncomfortable chairs and drinking absinthe while talking of business, or walking along the pavements in the midst of the deafening noise of cabs in the street.

"I shall know nothing of the state of the Bourse, the fluctuations of stocks and shares, all the useless stupidities in which we waste our short, miserable and treacherous existence. Why all this trouble, all this suffering, all these struggles? I shall rest, sheltered from the wind, in my bright, sumptuous home.

"And I shall have four or five wives in luxurious apartments — five wives who have come from the five continents of the world and who will bring to me a taste of feminine beauty as it flowers in all races."

Again he stopped, and then he said softly:

"Leave me."

I went, and I never saw him again.

Two months later he sent me these three words only: "I am happy."

His letter smelled of incense and other sweet perfumes.

## A MILLION

IT was a modest clerk's household. The husband, who was employed in a Government office, was conventional and painstaking, and he always was very careful in the discharge of his duties. His name was Léopold Bonnin. He was a mediocre young man who held the right opinions about everything. He had been brought up a Christian, but he was inclined to be less religious since the country had begun to move in the direction of the separation of Church and State. He would say in loud tones at the office: "I am a believer, a true believer, but I believe in God, not in the clergy." His greatest claim was that he was an honest man. He would strike his chest as he said so. And he was an honest man, in the most humdrum sense of the word. He arrived punctually at his office and left as punctually. He never idled and was always very straight in "money matters." He had married the daughter of one of his poor colleagues, whose sister, however, was worth a million, having been married for love. She had had no children, which was a deep disappointment for her, and, consequently, she had no one to whom she could leave her money except her niece. This legacy was the constant preoccupation of the family. It haunted the house, and even the office. It was known that "the Bonnins would come in for a million."

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The young couple were also childless, a fact which did not distress them in the least, as they were perfectly satisfied with their humdrum, narrow life. Their home was well-kept, clean and thrifty; they were both very placid and moderate in all things, and they firmly believed that a child would upset their lives, and interfere with their habits.

They would not have endeavoured to remain without heirs; but, since Heaven had not blessed them in that particular respect, they thought it was no doubt for the best.

The wealthy aunt, however, was not to be consoled, and was profuse with practical advice. Years ago, she had vainly tried a number of methods recommended by clairvoyants and her women friends, and since she had reached the age where all thought of offspring had to be abandoned, she had heard of many more, which she supposed to be unfailing, and which she persisted in revealing to her niece. Every now and then she would inquire: "Well, have you tried what I told you about the other day?"

Finally she died. The young people experienced a delighted relief which they sought to conceal from themselves as well as from the outside world. Often one's conscience is garbed in black while the soul sings with joy.

They were notified that a will had been deposited with a lawyer, and they went to the latter's office immediately after leaving the church.

The aunt, faithful to her life-long idea, had bequeathed her fortune to their first-born child, with the provision that the income was to be used by the parents until their decease. Should the young

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couple have no offspring within three years, the money was to go to the poor and needy.

They were completely overwhelmed. The husband collapsed and stayed away from the office for a week. When he recovered, he resolved with sudden energy to become a parent.

He persisted in his endeavours for six months, until he was but the shadow of his former self. He remembered all the hints his aunt had given and put them into practice conscientiously, but without results. His desperate determination lent him a factitious strength, which, however, proved almost fatal.

He became hopelessly anaemic. His physician stood in dread of tuberculosis, and terrified him to such an extent that he forthwith resumed his peaceful habits, even more peaceful than before, and began a restorative treatment.

Broad rumours had begun to float around the office. All the clerks had heard about the disappointing will, and they made much fun over what they termed the "million franc deal."

Some ventured to give Bonnin facetious advice; while others dared to offer themselves for the accomplishment of the distressing clause. One tall fellow, especially, who had the reputation of being quite a roué and whose many affairs were notorious throughout the office, teased him constantly with veiled allusions, broad hints and the boast that he, Morel, could make him, Bonnin, inherit in about twenty minutes.

However, one day, Léopold Bonnin became suddenly infuriated, and jumping out of his chair, his quill behind his ear, he shouted: "Sir, you are a

## A MILLION

cur; if I did not respect myself, I would spit in in your face."

Witnesses were despatched to the antagonists, and for days the whole department was in an uproar. They were to be found everywhere, in and out of the offices, meeting in the halls to discuss some important point and to exchange their views of the affair. Finally a document was drawn up by the four delegates and accepted by the interested parties, who gravely shook hands and mumbled a few words of apology in the presence of the department chief.

During the month that followed, the two men bowed ceremoniously and with affected courtesy, as became adversaries who had met on the field of honour. But one day, they happened to collide against each other in the hall, outside of the office, whereupon Monsieur Bonnin inquired with dignity: "I trust I did not hurt you?" And Monsieur Morel replied: "Not in the least."

After that encounter, they saw fit to speak a few words whenever they met. And little by little they became more friendly, appreciated one another and grew to be inseparable.

But Léopold was unhappy. His wife kept taunting him with allusions, torturing him with thinly veiled sarcasm.

And the days were flitting by. One year had already elapsed since the aunt's demise. The inheritance seemed lost to them.

When sitting down to dinner Madame Bonnin would remark: "We have not very much to eat; it would be different if we were well off."

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Or, when Léopold was ready to start for the office, his wife would hand him his walking-stick and observe: "If we had an income of fifty thousand francs, you would not have to kill yourself working, you poor quill-driver."

When Madame Bonnin went out on a rainy day, she would invariably murmur: "If we had a carriage, I would not be compelled to ruin my clothes on a day like this."

In fact, at all times, she seemed to blame her husband, rendering him alone responsible for the state of affairs and the loss of the fortune.

Finally, growing desperate, he took her to a well-known physician, who, after a lengthy consultation, expressed no opinion and declared he could discover nothing unusual; that similar cases were of frequent occurrence; that it was the same with bodies as with minds; that, after having seen so many couples separated through incompatibility of temper, it was not surprising to find some who were childless because of physical incompatibility. The consultation cost forty francs.

A year went by, and war was declared between the pair, incessant, bitter war, almost ferocious hatred. And Madame Bonnin never stopped saying over and over again: "Isn't it dreadful to lose a fortune because one happens to have married a fool!" or "to think that if I had married another man, to-day I would have an income of forty thousand francs!" or again: "Some people are always in the way. They spoil everything."

In the evening, after dinner, the tension became wellnigh insufferable. One night, fearing a terrible

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scene, and not knowing how to ward it off, Léopold brought his friend, Frédéric Morel, with whom he had almost had a duel, home with him. Soon Morel became the friend of the house, the counsellor of husband and wife.

The expiration of the delay stipulated in the will was drawing near; only six months more and the fortune would go to the poor and needy. And little by little Léopold's attitude toward his wife changed. He, too, became aggressive, taunting, would make obscure insinuations, mentioning in a mysterious way wives of clerks who had built up their husbands' careers.

Every little while he would bring up some story of promotion that had fallen to the luck of some obscure clerk. "Little Ravinot, who was only a temporary clerk, five years ago, has been made assistant chief clerk." Then Madame Bonnin would reply: "It certainly is not you who could accomplish anything like that."

Léopold would shrug his shoulders.

"As if he did more than anyone else! He has a bright wife, that is all. She captivated the head of the department and now gets everything she wants. In this life we have to look out that we are not fooled by circumstances."

What did he really mean? What did she infer? What occurred? Each of them had a calendar on which the days which separated them from the fatal term were marked; and every week they were overcome by a sort of madness, a desperate rage, a wild exasperation, so that they felt capable of committing a crime if necessary.

And then one morning Madame Bonnin, with shining eyes and a radiant face, laid her hands on her husband's shoulders, looked at him intently, joyfully, and whispered: "I believe that I am pregnant." He experienced such a shock that he almost collapsed; and suddenly clasping his wife in his arms, he drew her down on his knee, kissed her like a beloved child and, overwhelmed by emotion, sobbed aloud.

Two months later, doubt was no longer possible. He went with her to a physician and had the latter make out a certificate which he handed to the executor of the will. The lawyer stated that, inasmuch as the child existed, whether born or unborn, he could do nothing but bow to circumstances, and would postpone the execution of the will until the birth of the heir.

A boy was born, whom they christened Dieudonné, in remembrance of the practice in royal households.

They were very rich.

One evening, when M. Bonnin came home — his friend Frédéric Morel was to dine with them — his wife remarked casually: "I have just requested our friend Frédéric never to enter this house again. He insulted me." Léopold looked at her for a second with a light of gratitude in his eyes, and then he opened his arms; she flew to him and they kissed each other tenderly, like the good, united, upright little couple that they were.

And it is worth while to hear Madame Bonnin talk about women who have transgressed for love, and those whom a great passion has led to adultery.

## TOINE

### I

OLD Toine was known for twenty miles around, fat Toine, Toine-ma-Fine, Antoine Mâcheblé, alias Brûlot, the innkeeper at Tournevent.

He had made famous this hamlet, buried in the depths of the valley which ran down to the sea, a poor peasant hamlet, composed of a dozen Norman houses surrounded by ditches and trees. The houses were huddled together in this ravine, covered with grass and furze, behind the curve of the hill, which had given the village the name of Tournevant. As birds conceal themselves in the furrows during a storm, they seemed to have sought a shelter in this hollow, a shelter against the fierce salt winds of the sea, which gnawed and burned like fire, and withered and destroyed like the frosts of winter.

The whole hamlet seemed to be the property of Antoine Mâcheblé, alias Brûlot, who was, besides, often called Toine, and Toine-ma-Fine, because of a phrase which he constantly used. "My *fine* is the best in France," he would say. His *fine* was his cognac, be it understood. For twenty years he had soaked the countryside in his cognac, for whenever his customers said: "Well, what is it going to be, my boy?" he invariably replied: "Try a brandy, old son. It warms the stomach and clears the head; there is nothing better for your health."

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He called everybody "old son," although he had never had a son of his own.

Ah, yes, everyone knew old Toine, the biggest man in the district, or even in the country. His little house seemed too ridiculously small to contain him, and when he was seen standing in his doorway, where he spent the greater part of every day, one wondered how he could enter his home. But he did enter each time a customer presented himself, for Toine-ma-Fine was invited by right to levy a glass on all who drank in his house.

His café bore on its sign the legend "The Rendezvous of Friends," and old Toine was truly the friend of all the country round. People came from Fécamp and Montivilliers to see him and laugh at his stories — for this great, good-natured man could bring a smile to the most solemn face. He had a way of joking without giving offence, of winking his eye to express what he dare not utter, and of slapping his thigh in his bursts of mirth which made one laugh in spite of oneself. And then it was a curiosity just to see him drink. He drank all that was offered him by everybody, with a joy in his wicked eye, a joy which came from a double pleasure: first, the pleasure of regaling himself, and then the pleasure of heaping up money at the expense of his friends.

The local wits would ask:

"Tell us now, Toine. Why don't you drink up the sea?"

And he would reply:

"There are two objections. First, it is salty, and second, it would have to be bottled; my paunch prevents me from stooping down to that cup."

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The quarrels of Toine and his wife were Homeric! It was such a good show that one would have paid to see it. They had squabbled every day through the whole thirty years of their married life. Only Toine was good-natured over it, while his wife was furious. She was a tall peasant woman who walked with long stilt-like strides, her thin, flat body surmounted by the head of an ugly screech-owl. She spent her whole time in rearing poultry in the little yard behind the inn, and was renowned for the success with which she fattened her fowls.

When any of the great ladies of Fécamp gave a feast to the people of quality, it was necessary to the success of the repast that it should be garnished with the celebrated fowls from mother Toine's poultry-yard.

But she was born with a vile temper and had continued to be dissatisfied with everything. Angry with everybody, she was particularly so with her husband. She jeered at his gaiety, his popularity, his good health, and his fatness; she treated him with the utmost contempt because he got his money without working for it, and because, as she said, he ate and drank as much as ten ordinary men. Not a day passed without her declaring, in exasperated tones: "Wouldn't a hog like that be better in the sty with the pigs! He's that fat, it makes me sick in the stomach." "Wait a little, wait a little," she would shriek in his face, "we shall soon see what is going to happen! This great wind-bag will burst like a sack of grain!"

Toine laughed, tapping his enormous belly, and

replied: "Ah, old skinny, let us see you try to make your chickens as fat as this."

And rolling up his sleeve he showed his brawny arm. "There's a wing for you!" he would cry. And the customers would strike their fists on the table and fairly writhe with joy, and stamp their feet and spit upon the floor in a delirium of delight.

The old woman grew more furious than ever, and shouted at the top of her lungs: "Just wait a bit, we shall see what will happen. You will burst like a sack of grain."

And she rushed out, maddened with rage at the laughter of the crowd of drinkers.

Toine, in fact, was a wonder to see, so fat and red and short of breath had he grown. He was one of those enormous creatures with whom Death seems to play, with tricks, and jokes, and treacherous buffooneries, making irresistibly comic<sup>1</sup> the slow work of destruction. Instead of behaving as he did towards others, showing the white hairs, shrunken limbs, wrinkles, and general feebleness which makes one say with a shiver: "Heavens, how he has changed!" Death took pleasure in fattening Toine; in making a droll monster of him, in reddening his face and giving him the appearance of superhuman health; and the deformities which he inflicted on others became in Toine's case laughable and diverting instead of sinister and pitiable.

"Wait a little, wait a little," muttered mother Toine, as she scattered the grain about her poultry-yard, "you will see what will happen!"

It happened that Toine had a seizure, and fell down with a paralytic stroke. They carried the giant to the little chamber partitioned off at the rear of the café in order that he might hear what was going on on the other side of the wall, and converse with his friends, for his brain remained clear while his enormous body was prone and helpless. They hoped for a time that his mighty limbs would recover some of their energy, but this hope disappeared very soon, and Toine was forced to pass his days and nights in his bed, which was made up but once a week, with the help of four friends who lifted him by his four limbs while his mattress was turned. He continued to be cheerful, but with a different kind of good humour; more timid, more humble, and with the pathetic fear of a little child in the presence of his wife, who scolded and raged all the day long. "There he lies, the boozer, the good-for-nothing, the idler!" she cried. Toine replied nothing, only winking his eye behind the old woman's back, and turned over in the bed, the only movement he was able to make. He called this change "making a move to the north, or a move to the south." His only entertainment now was to listen to the conversation in the café and to join in the talk across the wall, and when he recognized the voice of a friend he would cry: "Hello, old son; is that you, Célestin?"

And Célestin Maloisel would reply: "It is me, father Toine. How are the legs to-day, my boy?" "I can't run yet, Célestin," Toine would an-

swer, "but I am not growing thin, either. The shell is good." Soon he invited his intimates into his bedroom for company, because it pained him to see them drinking without him. He would say: "Boys, what knocks me is not to be able to have a glass. I don't care a hoot about anything else, but it's terrible not to drink."

Then the screech-owl's head of mother Toine would appear at the window, and she would cry: "Look, look at him! this great hulking idler, who must be fed and washed and scoured like a pig!"

And when she disappeared a red-plumaged rooster sometimes perched on the window-sill, and, looking about with his round and curious eye, gave forth a shrill crow. And sometimes two or three hens flew in and scratched and pecked about the floor, attracted by the crumbs which fell from father Toine's plate.

The friends of Toine-ma-Fine very soon deserted the café for his room, and every afternoon they gossiped around the bed of the big man. Bedridden as he was, this rascal Toine still amused them; he would have made the devil himself laugh, the jolly fellow! There were three friends who came every day: Célestin Maloisel, a tall, spare man with a body twisted like the trunk of an apple-tree; Prosper Horslaville, a little dried-up old man with a nose like a ferret, malicious and sly as a fox; and Césaire Paumelle, who never uttered a word, but who enjoyed himself all the same. They brought in a board from the yard which they placed across the bed and on which they played dominoes from two o'clock in the afternoon until six. But mother

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Toine soon interfered: she could not endure that her husband should amuse himself by playing dominoes in his bed, and, each time she saw the game begin, she bounded into the room in a rage, overturned the board, seized the dominoes, and carried them into the café, declaring that it was enough to feed this great lump of fat, without seeing him amuse himself at the expense of hard-working people. Célestin Maloisel bent his head before the storm, but Prosper Horslaville tried to further excite the old woman, whose rages amused him. Seeing her one day more exasperated than usual, he said: "Hello, mother Toine! Do you know what I would do if I were in your place?"

She waited for an explanation, fixing her owl-like eyes upon him. He continued:

"Your husband, who never leaves his bed, is as hot as an oven. I should set him to hatching out eggs."

She remained stupefied, thinking he was jesting, watching the thin, sly face of the peasant, who continued:

"I would put five eggs under each arm the same day that I set the yellow hen; they would all hatch out at the same time; and when they were out of their shells, I would put your husband's chicks under the hen for her to bring up. That would bring you some poultry, mother Toine."

The old woman was amazed. "Is it possible?" she asked.

Prosper continued: "Why can't it? Since they put eggs in a warm box to hatch, one might as well put them in a warm bed."

She was greatly impressed with this reasoning, and went out completely quieted down and thoughtful.

Eight days later she came into Toine's chamber with her apron full of eggs, and said: "I have just put the yellow hen to set with ten eggs under her; here are ten for you! Be careful not to break them!"

Toine was astonished. "What do you mean?" he cried.

"I mean that you shall hatch them, good-for-nothing."

Toine laughed at first, then as she insisted he grew angry, he resisted and obstinately refused to allow her to put the eggs under his great arms, that his warmth might hatch them. But the baffled old woman grew furious and declared: "You shall have not a bite to eat so long as you refuse to take them — there, we'll see what will happen!"

Toine was uneasy, but he said nothing. When he heard the clock strike twelve he called to his wife: "Hey, Mother, is the soup ready?" The old woman shouted from the kitchen: "There is no dinner for you to-day, you lazy thing!"

He thought at first she was joking, and waited. Then he begged and prayed and swore by fits; turned himself "to the north" and "to the south," grew desperate under the pangs of hunger and the smell of the viands, and pounded on the wall with his great fists, until at last, worn out and almost famished, he allowed his wife to introduce the eggs into his bed and place them under his arms. After that he had his soup.

When his friends arrived, they believed Toine to be very ill; he seemed constrained and uneasy.

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Then they began to play dominoes as formerly, but Toine appeared to take no pleasure in the game, and put forth his hand so gingerly and with such evident precaution that they suspected at once something was wrong.

"Is your arm tied?" demanded Horslaville.

Toine feebly responded: "I have a feeling of heaviness in my shoulder."

Suddenly some one entered the café, and the players paused to listen. It was the mayor and his assistant, who called for two glasses of cognac and then began to talk of the affairs of the country. As they spoke in low tones, Toine Brûlot tried to press his ear against the wall; and forgetting his eggs, he gave a sudden lunge "to the north," which resulted in his lying down on an omelet. At the oath he uttered, mother Toine came running in, and divining the disaster she uncovered him with a jerk. She stood a moment too enraged and breathless to speak, at the sight of the yellow poultice pasted on the flank of her husband. Then, trembling with fury, she flung herself on the paralytic and began to pound him with great force on the body, as though she were pounding her dirty linen on the banks of the river. She showered her blows upon him with the force and rapidity of a drummer beating his drum.

The friends of Toine were choking with laughter, coughing, sneezing, uttering exclamations, while the frightened man parried the attacks of his wife with due precaution in order not to break the five eggs he still had on the other side.

Toine was conquered. He was compelled to hatch eggs. He had to renounce the innocent pleasure of dominoes, to give up any effort to move, for his wife deprived him of all nourishment every time he broke an egg. He lay on his back, with his eyes fixed on the ceiling, his arms extended like wings, warming against his immense body the incipient chicks in their white shells. He spoke only in low tones as if he feared a noise as much as a movement, and he asked often about the yellow hen in the poultry-yard, who was engaged in the same task as himself.

"Did the yellow one eat last night?" he would say to his wife.

The old woman went from the hen to her husband, and from her husband to the hen, possessed and preoccupied with the little broods which were maturing in the bed and in the nest. The country people, who soon learned the story, came in, curious and serious, to get the news of Toine. They entered on tiptoe as one enters a sick-chamber, and inquired with concern:

"How goes it, Toine?"

"That's all right," he answered; "But it is so long, I get very hot. I feel cold shivers galloping all over my skin."

One morning his wife came in very much disturbed, and exclaimed: "The yellow hen has hatched seven chicks; there were but three bad eggs!"

Toine felt his heart beat. How many would he have?

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"Will it be soon?" he asked, with the anguish of a woman who is about to become a mother.

The old woman, who was tortured by the fear of failure, answered angrily:

"It is to be hoped so!"

They waited.

The friends, seeing that Toine's time was approaching, became very uneasy themselves. They gossiped about it in the house, and kept all the neighbours informed of the progress of affairs. Towards three o'clock Toine grew drowsy. He slept now half the time. He was suddenly awakened by an unusual tickling under his arm. He put his hand carefully to the place and seized a little beast covered with yellow down, which struggled between his fingers. His emotion was so great that he cried out and let go the chick, which ran across his breast. The *café* was full of people. The customers rushed into the room and circled round the bed, as if they were at a circus, while mother Toine, who had arrived at the first sound, carefully caught the fledgeling as it nestled in her husband's beard. No one uttered a word. It was a warm April day; one could hear through the open window the clucking of the yellow hen calling to her new born. Toine, who perspired with emotion and agony, murmured: "I feel another one now under my left arm."

His wife plunged her great, gaunt hand under the bed-clothes and drew forth a second chick with all the precautions of a midwife.

The neighbours wished to see it and passed it from hand to hand, regarding it with awe as though

it were a phenomenon. For the space of twenty minutes no more were hatched, then four chicks came out of their shells at the same time. This caused great excitement among the watchers.

Toine smiled, happy at his success, and began to feel proud of this singular paternity. Such a sight had never been seen before. This was a droll man, truly! "That makes six," cried Toine. "By heavens, what a christening there will be!" and a great laugh rang out from the public. Other people now crowded into the café and filled the doorway, with outstretched necks and curious eyes.

"How many has he?" they inquired.

"There are six."

Mother Toine ran with the new fledglings to the hen, who, clucking distractedly, erected her feathers and spread wide her wings to shelter her increasing flock of little ones.

"Here comes another one!" cried Toine. He was mistaken — there were three of them. This was a triumph! The last one broke its shell at seven o'clock in the evening. All Toine's eggs were good! He was delivered, and, delirious with joy, he seized and kissed the frail little creature on the back. He could have smothered it with caresses. He wished to keep this little one in his bed until the next day, moved by the tenderness of a mother for this being to whom he had given life; but the old woman carried it away, as she had done the others, without listening to the supplications of her husband.

The spectators went home delighted, talking of the event by the way, and Horslaville, who was the

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last to leave, said: "You will invite me to the first fricassee, won't you, Toine?"

At the idea of a fricassee, Toine's face brightened and he answered:

"Certainly I will invite you, my son."

## FRIEND PATIENCE

“DO you know what ever became of Leremy?”  
“He is captain in the Sixth Dragoons.”  
“And Pinson?”  
“He’s a Subprefect.”  
“And Racollet?”  
“Dead.”

We were trying to remember other names which would remind us of youthful faces under the caps of young officers. Later in life we had met some of these old comrades, bearded, bald, married, fathers of several children, and the realization of these changes had given us an unpleasant shudder, reminding us how short life is, how everything passes away, how everything changes. My friend asked me:

“And Patience, fat Patience?”

I almost howled:

“Oh! as for him, just listen to this. Four or five years ago I was in Limoges, on a tour of inspection, and I was waiting for dinner time. I was seated before the big café in the Place du Théâtre, bored to tears. The tradespeople were coming by twos, threes or fours, to take their absinthe or vermouth, talking all the time of their own or other people’s business, laughing loudly, or lowering their voices in order to impart some important or delicate piece of news.

“I was saying to myself: ‘What am I going to do after dinner?’ And I thought of the long evening in this provincial town, of the slow, uninteresting walk through unknown streets, of the overwhelming sadness inspired in the solitary traveller by the people who pass, strangers in all things, the cut of their provincial coats, their hats, their trousers, their customs, local accent, their houses, shops, and carriages of singular shape. And then the ordinary sounds to which one is not accustomed; the harassing sadness which makes you hasten your step gradually, until you feel as if you were lost in a dangerous country, which oppresses you and you wish yourself back at the hotel, the hideous hotel, where your room preserves a thousand suspicious odours, where the bed makes one hesitate, and the basin has a hair stuck in the dirt at the bottom.

“I thought about all this as I watched them light the gas, feeling my isolated distress increase as the shadows fell. What was I going to do after dinner? I was alone, entirely alone, and lamentably lonesome.

“A big man came in, seated himself at a neighbouring table, and commanded in a formidable voice:

“‘Waiter, my bitters.’

“The ‘my’ in the phrase sounded like the report of a cannon. I understood immediately that everything in existence was his, belonged to him and not to any other, that he had his character, and, by Jove! his appetite, his trousers, *bis* no matter what, after his own fashion, absolutely,

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and more completely than anybody else in the world. He looked about him with a satisfied air. They brought him his bitters and he called:

“‘My paper.’

“I asked myself: ‘Which is his paper, I wonder?’ The name of that would certainly reveal to me his opinions, his theories, his hobbies, and his nature.

“The waiter brought the ‘Temps.’ I was surprised. Why the ‘Temps,’ a grave, dull, doctrinal, heavy paper? I thought:

“So he is a wise man, of serious ways, regular habits, in short, a good citizen.”

“He placed his gold eyeglasses on his nose, turned around and, before commencing to read, cast another glance all around the room. He noticed me and immediately began to look at me in a persistent, uneasy fashion. I was on the point of asking him the reason for his attention, when he cried out from where he sat:

“‘By Jove, if it is not Gontran Lardois!’

“I answered: ‘Yes, sir, you are not mistaken.’

“Then he got up brusquely and came towards me with outstretched hands.

“‘Ah! my old friend, how are you?’ asked he.

“My greeting was constrained, as I did not recognize him at all. Finally I stammered:

“‘Why — very well — and you?’

“He began to laugh: ‘I bet you do not know me.’

“‘No, not quite — It seems to me — however —’

“He tapped me on the shoulder:

“‘There, there! Don’t try to fool me. I am Patience, Robert Patience, your chum, your comrade.’

## FRIEND PATIENCE

"I recognized him. Yes, Robert Patience, my comrade at college. It was he. I pressed the hand he extended to me and said:

"Everything going well with you?"

"With me? Like a charm."

"His laugh rang with triumph. He inquired:

"What has brought you here?"

"I explained to him that I was an inspector of finances, making the rounds.

"He replied, observing my badge: 'Then you are successful?'

"I replied: 'Yes, rather; and you?'

"Oh! I? Very, very!"

"What are you doing now?"

"I am in business."

"Then you are making money?"

"Lots of it. I am rich. But, come to lunch with me to-morrow at noon, No. 17 Rue du Coq-qui-chante; then you will see my place."

"He appeared to hesitate a second, then continued:

"You are still the good pal you used to be?"

"Yes, — I hope so."

"Not married?"

"No."

"So much the better. And you are still fond of a little beer and skittles?"

"I commenced to find him deplorably commonplace. I answered, nevertheless: 'Yes.'

"And pretty girls?"

"Yes, certainly."

"He began to laugh, with a good, hearty laugh:

"So much the better, so much the better," said

he. ‘You recall our first night out at Bordeaux, when we had supper at Roupie’s? Ha! what a night!’

“I did remember that spree; and the memory of it amused me. Other facts were brought to mind, and still others. One would say:

“‘Do you remember the time we shut up the fawn in old Latoque’s cellar?’

“And he would laugh, striking his fist upon the table, repeating:

“‘Yes — yes — yes — and you remember the face of the professor of geography, M. Marin, when we sent off a cracker on the map of the world just as he was orating on the principal volcanoes of the earth?’

“Then suddenly, I asked him:

“‘And you, are you married?’

“He cried: ‘For ten years, my dear fellow, and I have four children, most astonishing kids; but you will see them and their mother.’

“We were talking loudly; the neighbours were looking around at us in astonishment. Suddenly my friend looked at his watch, a chronometer as large as a turnip, and cried out:

“‘Heavens! what a nuisance, but I shall have to leave you; I am not free this evening.’

“He rose, took both my hands and shook them as if he wished to break off my arms, and said:

“‘To-morrow at noon, you remember?’

“‘All right.’

“I passed the morning working at the General-Treasurer’s. He wished to keep me for luncheon, but I told him that I had an appointment with a

## FRIEND PATIENCE

friend. As he was going out, he accompanied me. I asked him:

“Do you know where the Rue du Coq-qui-chante is?”

“Yes,” he replied, “it is five minutes from here. As I have nothing to do, I will conduct you there.”

“And we set out. Soon, I noticed the street we were looking for. It was wide, pretty enough, on the extreme outskirts of the town. I looked at the houses and perceived number 17. It was a kind of hotel with a garden at the back. The front, ornamented with frescoes in the Italian fashion, appeared to me in bad taste. There were goddesses hanging to urns, and others whose secret beauties a cloud concealed. Two stone Cupids held up the number.

“I said to the Treasurer: ‘Here is where I am going.’

“And I extended my hand by way of leaving him. He made a brusque and singular gesture, but said nothing, pressing the hand I had held out to him. I rang. A maid appeared. I said:

“M. Patience, if you please. Is he at home?”

“She replied: ‘He is here, sir — Do you wish to speak with him?’

“Yes.”

“The vestibule was ornamented with paintings from the brush of some local artist. Paul and Virginia were embracing under some palms drowned in a rosy light. A hideous Oriental lantern hung from the ceiling. There were many doors, masked by showy hangings. But that which struck me particularly was the odour — a permeating, per-

## FRIEND PATIENCE

fumed odour, recalling rice powder and the mouldiness of cellars — an indefinable odour in a heavy atmosphere, as overwhelming and as stifling as the furnaces in which human bodies are burned. Following the maid, I went up a marble staircase which was covered by a carpet of some Oriental kind, and was led into a sumptuous drawing-room.

“On being left alone, I looked about me.

“The room was richly furnished, but with the pretension of an ill-bred parvenu. The engravings of the last century were pretty enough, representing women with high, powdered hair and half naked, surprised by gallant gentlemen in interesting postures. Another lady, lying on a huge disordered bed, was teasing with her foot a little dog buried in the sheets. Another resisted her lover complacently, as his hand strayed under her petticoat. One sketch showed four feet whose bodies could be divined, although concealed behind a curtain. The vast room, surrounded by soft divans, was entirely impregnated with this enervating odour, which had already taken hold of me. There was something suspicious about these walls, these stuffs, this exaggerated luxury, in short, the whole place.

“I approached the window to look into the garden, of which I could see but the trees. It was large, shady, superb. A broad path circled the lawn, where a fountain was playing in the air, flowed under some bushes, and reappeared some distance off. And suddenly three women appeared, down at the end of the garden, between two hedges of shrubs. They were walking slowly, arm in arm,

## FRIEND PATIENCE

clad in long, white tea-gowns covered with lace. Two were blondes and the other was dark-haired. Almost immediately they disappeared again behind the trees. I stood there entranced, delighted with this short and charming apparition, which brought to my mind a whole world of poetry. They had scarcely allowed themselves to be seen, in just the proper light, in that frame of foliage, in the midst of that mysterious, delightful park. It seemed to me that I had suddenly seen before me the great ladies of the last century, who were depicted in the engravings on the wall. And I began to think of these happy, joyous, witty and amorous times when manners were so graceful and lips so approachable.

“A deep voice made me jump. Patience had come in, beaming, and held out his hands to me.

“He looked into my eyes with the sly look which one takes when divulging secrets of love, and, with a Napoleonic gesture, he showed me his sumptuous parlour, his park, the three women, who had reappeared in the background. Then, in a triumphant voice, in which the note of pride was discernible, he said:

“‘And to think that I began with nothing — my wife and my sister-in-law!’”

## THE DOWRY

**N**O one was surprised at the marriage of Maître Simon Lebrument and Mlle. Jeanne Cordier. Maître Lebrument had just bought the practice of Maître Papillon, the notary; he needed money, of course, with which to pay for it; and Mlle. Jeanne Cordier had three hundred thousand francs clear, in notes and bearer bonds.

Maître Lebrument was a handsome fellow, who had style, the style of a notary, a provincial style, but, after all, some style, which was a rare thing at Boutigny-le-Rebours.

Mlle. Cordier had grace and freshness, grace which was a little awkward, and freshness a little artificial; but she was, nevertheless, a pretty girl, desirable and entertaining.

The wedding ceremonies turned Boutigny topsyturvy. The married couple were much admired, and they returned to the conjugal domicile to conceal their happiness, having resolved simply to take a little trip to Paris, after they had spent a few days together.

These few days together were charming, for Maître Lebrument knew how to manage his early relations with his wife with a delicacy, a directness, and a sense of fitness that was remarkable. He took for his motto: "Everything comes to him who waits." He knew how to be patient and

## THE DOWRY

energetic at the same time. His success was rapid and complete.

After four days Madame Lebrument adored her husband. She could not bear to be a moment away from him. He must be near her all day long, that she might caress his hands, his beard, his nose, etc. She would sit upon his knees and, taking him by the ears, would say: "Open your mouth and shut your eyes." He opened his mouth with confidence, shut his eyes halfway, and then would receive a very long, sweet kiss that gave him great shivers down his back. And in his turn, he never had enough caresses, enough lips, enough hands, enough of anything with which to enjoy his wife from morning until evening, and from evening until morning.

As soon as the first week had passed away he said to his young companion:

"If you wish, we might leave for Paris next Tuesday. We shall be like lovers who are not married; go about to the theatres, the restaurants, the open-air concerts, and everywhere, everywhere."

She jumped for joy. "Oh! yes, yes," she replied, "let us go as soon as possible."

"And, as we must not forget anything, you might ask your father to have your dowry ready; I will take it with me, and at the same time pay Maître Papillon."

She answered: "I will speak to him about it to-morrow morning."

Then he seized her in his arms and renewed

## THE DOWRY

those little tendernesses she had learned to love so much in eight days.

The following Tuesday, the father-in-law and the mother-in-law accompanied to the station their daughter and son-in-law who were leaving for the capital. The father-in-law remarked:

"I tell you it is imprudent to carry so much money in your pockethook." And the young notary smiled.

"Do not be disturbed, father-in-law," he answered, "I am accustomed to these things. You know that in my profession it often happens that I have nearly a million about me. By carrying it with me, we escape a lot of formalities and delays, to say the least. Do not worry yourself."

Then the porter cried out: "Paris train. All ready!" and they hurried into a compartment where they found themselves with two old ladies.

Lebrument murmured in his wife's ear: "How annoying! Now I cannot smoke."

She answered in a low tone: "I am sorry too, but not on account of your cigar."

The engine puffed and started. The journey lasted an hour, during which they could not say anything of importance, because the two old ladies did not go to sleep.

When they were in the Saint-Lazare station, in Paris, Maître Lebrument said to his wife:

"If you wish, my dear, we will first go and breakfast on the Boulevard, then return at our leisure to find our trunk and give it to the porter of some hotel."

She consented immediately: "Oh! yes," said she,

## THE DOWRY

"let us breakfast in some restaurant. Is it far from here?"

"Yes, rather far, but we will take an omnibus."

She was astonished: "Why not a cab?" she asked.

He began smilingly to scold her: "Is that the way you economise? A cab for five minutes' ride, at six sous per minute! You do not deprive yourself of anything!"

"That is true," said she, a little confused.

A large omnibus was passing, with three horses at a trot. Lebrument hailed it: "Conductor! eh, conductor!"

The heavy vehicle stopped. The young notary pushed his wife inside, saying hurriedly, in a low voice:

"You get inside while I go up on top and smoke at least a cigarette before breakfast."

She had not time for any answer. The conductor, who had seized her by the arm to aid her in mounting the steps, pushed her into the bus, where she landed, half-frightened, upon a seat, and in a sort of stupor watched the feet of her husband through the windows at the back, as he climbed to the top.

She remained motionless between a large gentleman who smelled of a pipe and an old woman who smelled of a dog. All the other travellers, in two mute lines,—a grocer's boy, a workman, a sergeant of infantry, a gentleman with gold-rimmed spectacles and a silk hat with an enormous brim, like a gutter, and two ladies with an important, mincing air, which seemed to say: We are here, although we should be in a better place. Then

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there were two nuns, a little girl in long hair, and an undertaker. The assemblage looked like a collection of caricatures in a freak museum, a series of expressions of the human countenance, like a row of grotesque puppets which one knocks down at a fair.

The jolts of the carriage made them toss their heads a little, and as they shook, the flesh of their cheeks trembled; and the disturbance of the rolling wheels gave them an idiotic or sleepy look.

The young woman remained inert: "Why did he not come with me?" she asked herself. A vague sadness oppressed her. He might, indeed, have deprived himself of that cigarette!

The nuns gave the signal to stop. They alighted, one after the other, leaving an odour of old and faded skirts.

Soon after they were gone another stopped the bus. A cook came in, red and out of breath. She sat down and placed her basket of provisions upon her knees. A strong odour of dishwater pervaded the omnibus.

"It is further than I thought," said the young woman to herself.

The undertaker got out and was replaced by a coachman who smelled of a stable. The girl in long hair was succeeded by an errand-boy who exhaled the odours of his deliveries.

The notary's wife perceived all these things, ill at ease and so disheartened that she was ready to weep without knowing why.

Some others got out, still others came in. The omnibus went on through the interminable streets,

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stopped at the stations, and began its route again.

"How far it is!" said Jeanne. "Especially when one has nothing to amuse oneself, and cannot sleep!" She had not been so much fatigued for many days.

Little by little all the travellers got out. She remained alone, all alone. The conductor shouted: "Vaugirard!"

As she blushed, he again repeated: "Vaugirard!"

She looked at him, not understanding that this must be addressed to her as all her neighbours had gone. For the third time the man said: "Vaugirard!"

Then she asked: "Where are we?"

He answered in a gruff voice: "We are at Vaugirard, of course; I've told you twenty times already."

"Is it far from the Boulevard?" she asked.

"What Boulevard?"

"The Boulevard des Italiens."

"We passed that a long time ago."

"Ah! Will you be kind enough to tell my husband?"

"Your husband? Where is he?"

"On the outside."

"On the outside! It has been a long time since there was anybody there."

She made a terrified gesture. Then she said:

"How can it be? It is not possible. He got up there when I entered the omnibus. Look again; he must be there."

The conductor became rude: "Come, kid, that's enough talk. If there is one man lost, there are ten

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to be found. Be off, now! You will find another in the street."

The tears sprang to her eyes. She insisted: "But, sir, you are mistaken, I assure you that you are mistaken. He had a large pocketbook in his hand."

The employé began to laugh: "A large pocketbook? I remember. Yes, he got out at the Madeleine. That's right! He's left you behind! Ha! ha!"

The carriage was standing still. She got down and looked up, in spite of herself, to the roof, with an instinctive movement of the eye. It was totally deserted.

Then she began to weep aloud, without thinking that anyone was looking at or listening to her. Finally she said:

"What is going to become of me?"

The inspector came up and inquired: "What's the matter?"

The conductor answered in a jocose fashion:

"This lady's husband has left her on the way."

The other replied: "All right. It doesn't matter. Attend to your own business." And he turned on his heels.

Then she began to walk ahead, too much frightened, too much excited to think even where she was going. Where was she going? What should she do? How could such an error have occurred? Such an act of carelessness, of disregard, of unheard-of distraction!

She had two francs in her pocket. To whom

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could she apply? Suddenly she remembered her cousin Barral, who was a clerk in the Ministry of Marine.

She had just enough to hire a cab; she would go to him. And she met him just as he was starting for his office. Like Lebrument, he carried a large pocketbook under his arm.

She leaned out of the carriage and called: "Henry!"

He stopped, much surprised.

"Jeanne," said he, "here? — and alone? Where do you come from? What are you doing?"

She stammered, with her eyes full of tears: "My husband is lost somewhere —"

"Lost? where?"

"On the omnibus."

"On the omnibus! Oh!"

And she related to him the whole story, weeping much over the adventure.

He listened reflectively, and then asked:

"This morning? And was his head perfectly clear?"

"Oh! yes! And he had my dowry."

"Your dowry? The whole of it?"

"Yes, the whole of it — in order to pay for his practice."

"Well, my dear cousin, your husband, whoever he is, is probably well on his way towards the Belgian frontier by this time."

She did not yet comprehend. She stammered: "My husband — you say —"

"I say that he has run off with your — your capital — and that's all about it."

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She remained standing there, choking with grief, murmuring:

“Then he is — he is — is a wretch!”

Then, overcome with emotion, she fell on her cousin’s shoulder, sobbing violently.

As people were stopping to look at them, he guided her gently into the doorway of his house, and with his arm around her waist, he helped her up the stairs. When his astonished servant opened the door he said:

“Sophie, run to the restaurant and bring breakfast for two persons. I shall not go to the office to-day.”

## FEMININE MEN

**H**OW often we hear people say, "That man is charming, but he is a woman, a regular girl." They are alluding to the feminine men, the bane of our country.

For all we men in France are feminine, that is, fickle, fanciful, innocently treacherous, without consistency in our convictions or our will, violent and weak, as women are.

But the most irritating of the species is assuredly the Parisian and the boulevardier, in whom the appearance of intelligence is more marked, and who combines in himself all the attractions and all the faults of charming harlots to an exaggerated degree in virtue of his masculine temperament.

Our Chamber of Deputies is full of feminine men. They form the greater number of the amiable opportunists whom one might call "The Charmers." It is they who control by soft words and deceitful promises, who know how to shake hands in such a manner as to win hearts, how to say "My dear friend" in a certain tactful way to the people they know the least, to change their minds without suspecting it, to be carried away by each new idea, to be sincere in their weathercock convictions, to let themselves be deceived as they deceive others, to forget the next morning what they affirmed the day before.

## FEMININE MEN

The newspapers are full of male prostitutes. That is probably where one finds them most, but it is also where they are most needed. Certain papers, like the *Journal des Débats* and the *Gazette de France*, are exceptions.

Assuredly, every good journalist must be something of a prostitute — that is, at the command of the public, supple in following unconsciously the shades of public opinion, wavering and varying, sceptical and credulous, wicked and devout, a braggart and a true man, enthusiastic and ironical, and always convinced while believing in nothing.

Foreigners, our anti-types, as Mme. Abel called them, the stubborn English and the heavy Germans, regard us with a certain amazement mingled with contempt, and will continue so to regard us till the end of time. They consider us frivolous. It is not that, we are feminine. And that is why people love us in spite of our faults, why they come back to us despite the evil spoken of us; these are lovers' quarrels! . . .

The effeminate man, as one meets him in this world, is so charming that he captivates you after five minutes' chat. His smile seems made for you; you cannot believe that his voice does not assume specially tender intonations on your account. When he leaves you it seems as if you had known him for twenty years. One is quite ready to lend him money if he asks for it. He has enchanted you, like a woman.

If he does not act quite straight with you, you cannot bear any malice, he is so nice when you next meet him. If he asks your pardon you long

to ask pardon of him. Does he tell lies? You cannot believe it. Does he put you off indefinitely with promises that he does not keep? You lay as much store by his promises as though he had moved heaven and earth to render you a service.

When he admires anything he goes into such raptures that he convinces you. He once adored Victor Hugo, whom he now treats as a back number. He pretends that he fought for Zola, whom he has abandoned for Barbey d'Aurevilly. And when he admires, he permits no qualifications, he would slap your face for a word. But when he becomes scornful, his contempt is unbounded and allows of no protest.

In short, he understands nothing.

Listen to two girls talking.

"Then you are angry with Julia?" "I should say so. I slapped her face." "What had she done?" "She told Pauline that I was broke thirteen months out of twelve, and Pauline told Gontran — you understand." "You were living together in the Rue Clanzel?" "We lived together four years in the Rue Bréda; we quarrelled about a pair of stockings that she said I had worn — it wasn't true — silk stockings that she had bought at Mother Martin's. Then I gave her a pounding and she left me at once. I met her six months ago and she asked me to come and live with her, as she has rented a flat that is twice too large."

One goes on one's way and hears no more. But on the following Sunday as one is on the way to Saint Germain two young women get into the same railway carriage. One recognizes one of them at

## FEMININE MEN

once, it is Julia's enemy. The other is — Julia!

And there are endearments, caresses, plans. "Tell me, Julia — listen, Julia," etc.

The man of the species has his friendships of this kind. For three months he cannot bear to leave his old Jack, his dear Jack. There is no one but Jack in the world. He is the only one who has any intelligence, any sense, any talent. He alone is somebody in Paris. One meets them everywhere together, they dine together, walk about in company, and every evening see each other home, walking back and forth without being able to part.

Three months later, if Jack is mentioned:

"There is a cad, a bounder, a scoundrel for you. I know him well, you may be sure. And he is not even honest, and ill-bred," etc., etc.

Three months later, and they are living together.

But one morning one hears that they have fought a duel, then embraced each other, amid tears, on the duelling ground.

For the rest, they are the dearest friends in the world, furious with each other half the year, abusing and loving each other by turns, squeezing each other's hands till they almost crush the bones, and ready to run each other through the body for a misunderstanding.

For the relations of these feminine men are uncertain. Their temper is governed by fits and starts, their enthusiasms unexpected, their affection subject to sudden revulsions, their excitement is liable to eclipse. One day they love you, the next day they will hardly look at you, for they have,

## FEMININE MEN

in fact, a harlot's nature, a harlot's charm, a harlot's temperament, and all their sentiments are like the affections of harlots.

They treat their friends as kept women treat their pet dogs.

Their friends are like the little doggie which they hug, feed with sugar, and allow to sleep on the pillow, but which they would throw out of a window in a moment of impatience; which they swing round, holding it by the tail, squeeze in their arms till they almost strangle it, and plunge, without any reason, in a pail of cold water.

Then, what a strange thing it is when a feminine man falls in love with a real harlot! He beats her, she scratches him, they execrate each other, cannot bear the sight of each other and yet cannot part, linked together by no one knows what mysterious bonds of the heart. She deceives him, he knows it, sobs and forgives her. He sleeps in the bed which another man is paying for, and firmly believes his conduct is irreproachable. He despises and adores her without seeing that she would be justified in despising him. They are both atrociously unhappy and yet cannot separate. They cast invectives, reproaches and abominable accusations at each other from morning till night, and when they have reached the climax and are vibrating with rage and hatred, they fall into each other's arms and kiss each other ardently, their souls and bodies of strumpets united.

The feminine man is brave and a coward at the same time. He has, more than another, the exalted sentiment of honour, but is lacking in the sense

of simple honesty, and, circumstances favouring him, he would defalcate and commit infamies which do not trouble his conscience, for he obeys without questioning the oscillations of his ideas, which are always impulsive.

To him it seems permissible and almost right to cheat a shopkeeper. He considers it honourable not to pay his debts, unless they are gambling debts — that is, somewhat shady. He dupes people whenever the laws of society admit of his doing so. When he is short of money he borrows in all ways, not always being scrupulous as to tricking the lenders, but he would, with sincere indignation, run his sword through anyone who would even suspect him of lacking in delicacy.

## THE MOUSTACHE

CHÂTEAU DE SOLLES,  
Monday, July 30, 1883.

MY DEAR LUCY:

I have no news. We live in the drawing-room, looking out at the rain. We cannot go out in this frightful weather, so we have theatricals. My dear, how stupid these drawing-room plays are nowadays! Everything is forced, coarse, heavy. The jokes are like cannon balls, smashing everything in their passage. No wit, nothing natural, no good humour, no elegance. These literary men, in truth, know nothing of society. They are perfectly ignorant of how people think and talk in our set. I do not mind if they despise our customs, our conventions, and our manners, but I do not forgive them for not knowing them. When they want to be humorous they make puns that would entertain a sergeants' mess; when they try to be jolly, they give us jokes that they must have picked up on the outer boulevards, in those beer houses artists are supposed to frequent, where one has heard the same students' jokes for fifty years.

So we have taken to theatricals. As we are only two women, my husband takes the part of a soubrette, and, in order to do that, he has shaved off his moustache. You cannot imagine, my dear Lucy,

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how it changes him! I no longer recognize him — by day or at night. If he did not let it grow again I think I should no longer love him; he looks so horrid like this.

In fact, a man without a moustache is no longer a man. I do not care much for a beard; it almost always makes a man look untidy. But a moustache, oh, a moustache is indispensable to a manly face. No, you would never believe how pleasant these little hair bristles on the upper lip are to look at and ... in other ways. I have thought over the matter a great deal, but hardly dare to write my thoughts. I would like to whisper them to you. Words look so different on paper and the subject is so difficult, so delicate, so dangerous that it requires infinite skill to tackle it.

Well, when my husband appeared, shaven, I understood at once that I never could fall in love with a strolling actor nor a preacher, even if it were Father Didon, the most charming of all! Later when I was alone with him (my husband) it was worse still. Oh, my dear Lucy, never let yourself be kissed by a man without a moustache; their kisses have no flavour, none whatever! They no longer have the charm, the mellowness and the snap — yes, the snap — of a real kiss. The moustache is the spice.

Imagine placing to your lips a piece of dry — or moist — parchment. That is the kiss of the man without a moustache. It is not worth while.

Whence comes this charm of the moustache, will you tell me? Do I know myself? It tickles your face, you feel it approaching your mouth and it

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sends a little shiver through you down to the tips of your toes.

And on your neck! Have you ever felt a moustache on your neck? It intoxicates you, makes you feel creepy, goes to the tips of your fingers. You wriggle, shake your shoulders, toss back your head. You wish to get away and at the same time to remain there; it is delightful, but irritating. But how good it is!

And then ... really I am afraid to say it! A husband who loves you, absolutely, I mean, knows a lot of little corners to be kissed, places one never could think of alone. These kisses, without a moustache, also lose much of their flavour. In fact they become indecent. Can you explain this? I think I know why. A lip without a moustache is like a body without clothing; and one must wear clothes, very few, if you like, but still some clothing. The Creator (I dare not use any other word in speaking of such things) took care to cover all the parts of our body that were made for love. A shaven lip makes me think of trees that have been felled around a fountain where one hoped to quench one's thirst and rest.

I recall a sentence (uttered by a politician) which has been running in my mind for three months. My husband, who keeps up with the newspapers, read me one evening a very singular speech by our Minister of Agriculture, who was called M. Méline. He may have been superseded by this time. I do not know.

I was paying no attention, but the name Méline struck me. It recalled, I do not exactly know why,

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the "Scènes de la vie de bohème." I thought it was about some grisette. That shows how scraps of the speech entered my mind. This M. Méline was making this statement to the people of Amiens, I believe, and I have ever since been trying to understand what he meant: "There is no patriotism without agriculture!" Well, I have just discovered his meaning, and I affirm in my turn that there is no love without a moustache. When you say it that way it sounds comical, does it not?

There is no love without a moustache!

"There is no patriotism without agriculture," said M. Méline, and he was right, that minister; I now understand why.

From a very different point of view the moustache is essential. It gives character to the face. It makes a man look gentle, tender, violent, a monster, a rake, enterprising! The hairy man, who does not shave off his whiskers, never has a refined look, for his features are concealed, and the shape of the jaw and the chin betrays a great deal to those who understand.

The man with a moustache retains his own peculiar expression and his refinement at the same time.

And how many different varieties of moustaches there are! Sometimes they are twisted, curled, coquettish. Those seem to be chiefly devoted to women.

Sometimes they are pointed, sharp as needles, and threatening. That kind prefers wine, horses and war.

Sometimes they are enormous, overhanging, frightful. These big ones generally conceal a fine dis-

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position, a kindness that borders on weakness and a gentleness that savours of timidity.

But what I adore above all in the moustache is that it is French, altogether French. It came from our ancestors, the Gauls, and has remained the insignia of our national character.

It is boastful, gallant and brave. It sips wine gracefully and knows how to laugh with refinement, while the broad-bearded jaws are clumsy in everything they do.

I recall something that made me cry my heart out, and also — I see it now — made me love a moustache on a man's face.

It was during the war, when I was living with my father. I was a young girl then. One day there was a skirmish near the château. I had heard the firing of the cannon and of the artillery all the morning, and that evening a German colonel came and quartered himself in our house. He left the following day. My father was informed that there were a number of dead in the fields. He had them brought to our place so that they might be buried together. They were laid all along the great avenue of pines as fast as they brought them in, on both sides of the avenue, and as they began to smell, their bodies were covered with earth until the deep trench could be dug. Thus one saw only their heads, which seemed to protrude from the earth and were almost as yellow, with their closed eyes.

I wanted to see them. But when I saw those two rows of frightful faces, I thought I should faint. However, I began to look at them, one by one, trying to guess what kind of men these had been.

## THE MOUSTACHE

The uniforms were concealed beneath the earth, and yet immediately, yes, immediately, my dear, I recognized the Frenchmen by their moustache!

Some of them had shaved on the very day of the battle, as though they wished to be elegant up to the last; others seemed to have a week's growth, but all wore the French moustache, very plain, the proud moustache that seems to say: "Do not take me for my bearded friend, dear; I am a brother."

And I cried, oh, I cried a great deal more than I should if I had not recognized them, the poor dead fellows.

It was wrong of me to tell you this. Now I am sad and cannot chatter any longer. Well, good-bye, dear Lucy. I send you a hearty kiss. Long live the moustache!

JEANNE.

## BED NO. 29

WHEN Captain Épivent passed in the street all the ladies turned to look at him. He was the perfect type of a handsome hussar officer. He was always on parade, always strutted a little and seemed preoccupied and proud of his leg, his figure, and his moustache. He had superb ones, it is true, a superb moustache, figure and leg. The first-mentioned was blond, very heavy, falling partially from his lip in a beautiful sweep the colour of ripe wheat, carefully turned at the ends, and falling over both sides of his mouth in two powerful sprigs. His waist was thin as if he wore a corset, while a vigorous masculine chest, bulged and arched, spread itself above his waist. His leg was admirable, a gymnastic leg, the leg of a dancer, whose muscular flesh outlined each movement under the clinging cloth of his red trousers.

He walked with muscles taut, with feet and arms apart, and with the slightly swinging gait of the horseman, who knows how to make the most of his limbs and his carriage, and who seems a conqueror in a uniform, but looks commonplace in a mufti.

Like many other officers, Captain Épivent did not look well in civilian clothes. He had no elegance as soon as he was clothed in the grey or black of the shop assistant. But in his proper setting he was a triumph. He had, besides, a handsome face,

the nose thin and curved, blue eyes, and a good forehead. He was bald, and he never could understand why his hair had fallen out. He consoled himself with the thought that, with a heavy moustache, a head a little bald was not so bad.

He scorned everybody in general, with a difference in the degrees of his scorn.

In the first place, for him the middle class did not exist. He looked at them as he would look at animals, without according them more of his attention than he would give to sparrows or chickens. Officers, alone, counted in his world; but he did not have the same esteem for all officers. He only respected handsome men; an imposing presence, that true, military quality being first. A soldier was a gay fellow, a devil, created for love and war, a man of brawn and muscle, with hair on his chest, nothing more. He classed the generals of the French army according to their figure, their bearing, and the stern look of their faces. Bourbaki appeared to him the greatest warrior of modern times.

He often laughed at the officers of the line who were short and fat, and puffed while marching. And he had a special scorn for the poor recruits from the École Polytechnique, those thin, little men with spectacles, awkward and unskilful, who looked as appropriate in a uniform as a bull in a china shop, as he often asserted. He was indignant that they should be tolerated in the army, those abortions with the lank limbs, who marched like crabs, did not drink, ate little, and seemed to love equations better than pretty girls.

Captain Épivent himself had constant successes and triumphs with the fair sex.

Every time he took supper in company with a woman, he thought himself certain of finishing the night with her upon the same mattress, and, if unsurmountable obstacles prevented victory that evening, he was sure, at least, that the affair would be "continued in our next." His comrades did not like him to meet their mistresses, and the merchants in the shops, who had their pretty wives at the counter, knew him, feared him, and hated him desperately. When he passed, the merchants' wives, in spite of themselves, exchanged glances with him through the glass of the front windows; those looks that avail more than tender words, which contain an appeal and a response, a desire and an avowal. And the husbands, impelled by a sort of instinct, suddenly turned, casting a furious look at the proud, erect silhouette of the officer. And, when the Captain had passed, smiling and content with his impression, the merchants, handling with nervous hands the objects spread out before them, would declare:

"What a big fool! When shall we stop feeding all these good-for-nothings who go clattering their ironmongery through the streets? For my part, I would rather be a butcher than a soldier. Then if there's blood on my table, it is the blood of beasts, at least. And he is useful, is the butcher; and the knife he carries has not killed men. I do not understand how these murderers are tolerated, walking on the public streets, carrying with them their instruments of death. It is necessary to have them,

I suppose, but at least, let them conceal themselves, and not dress up in masquerade, with their red breeches and blue coats. The executioner doesn't dress himself up, does he?"

The woman, without answering, would shrug her shoulders, while the husband, divining the gesture without seeing it, would cry:

"Anybody must be stupid to watch those fellows parade up and down."

Nevertheless, Captain Épivent's reputation for conquests was well established in the whole French army.

Now, in 1868, his regiment, the One Hundred and Second Hussars came into garrison at Rouen.

He soon became known in the town. He came every evening, towards five o'clock, to Boieldieu Mall, to take his absinthe and coffee at the Comedy; and, before entering the establishment, he would always take a turn upon the promenade, to show his leg, his figure, and his moustaches.

The merchants of Rouen who also promenaded there with their hands behind their backs, preoccupied with business affairs, speaking of the ups and downs of the market, would sometimes throw him a glance and murmur:

"Egad! that's a handsome fellow!"

But when they knew him, they remarked:

"Look! Captain Épivent! A fine chap, say what you will!"

The women on meeting him had a very queer little movement of the head, a kind of shiver of modesty, as if they felt weak or unclothed in his

presence. They would lower their heads a little, with a smile upon their lips, as if they had a desire to be found charming and have a look from him. When he walked with a comrade the comrade never failed to murmur with jealous envy, each time that he saw the same by-play:

“This rascal Épivent has all the luck!”

Among the kept ladies of the town it was a struggle, a race, to see who would carry him off. They all came at five o’clock, the officers’ hour, to Boieldieu Mall, and dragged their skirts, in couples up and down the length of the walk, while the lieutenants, captains, and majors, two by two, dragged their swords along the ground before entering the café.

One evening the beautiful Irma, the mistress, it was said, of M. Templier-Papon, the rich manufacturer, stopped her carriage in front of the Comedy and, getting out, made a pretence of buying some paper or some visiting cards at M. Paulard’s, the engraver’s, in order to pass before the officers’ tables and cast a look at Captain Épivent, which seemed to say: “When you will,” so clearly that Colonel Prune, who was drinking the green liquor with his lieutenant-colonel, could not help muttering:

“Confound that fellow! He is lucky, that scamp!”

The remark of the Colonel was repeated, and Captain Épivent, moved by this approbation of his superior, passed the next day and many times after that under the windows of the beauty, in full uniform.

She saw him, showed herself, and smiled.

That same evening he was her lover.

They attracted attention, made an exhibition of their attachment, and mutually compromised themselves, both of them proud of their adventure.

Nothing was talked of in town except the amours of the beautiful Irma and the officer. M. Templier-Papon alone was ignorant of their relation.

Captain Épivent beamed with glory; every instant he would say:

"Irma happened to say to me — Irma told me to-night — or, yesterday at dinner Irma said —"

For a whole year they walked about and displayed in Rouen this love like a flag taken from the enemy. He felt his stature increased by this conquest, he was envied, more sure of his future, surer of the decoration so much desired, for the eyes of all were upon him, and it is sufficient to be well in the public eye in order not to be forgotten.

But war was declared, and the Captain's regiment was one of the first to be sent to the front. Their farewells were lamentable, lasting the whole night long.

Sword, red breeches, cap, and jacket were all overturned from the back of a chair upon the floor; robes, skirts, silk stockings, also fallen down, were spread around and mingled with the uniform abandoned on the carpet; the room upside down as if there had been a battle; Irma, wild, her hair unbound, threw her despairing arms around the officer's neck, straining him to her; then, leaving him, rolled upon the floor, overturning the furniture, catching the fringes of the arm-chairs, biting

their feet, while the Captain, much moved, but not skilful at consolation, repeated:

"Irma, my little Irma, do not cry so, it is necessary."

He occasionally wiped a tear from the corner of his eye with the tip of his finger. They separated at daybreak. She followed her lover in her carriage as far as the first stopping-place. Then she kissed him before the whole regiment at the moment of separation. People even found this very pretty, worthy, and very romantic; and the comrades pressed the Captain's hand and said to him:

"You lucky dog. She had a heart, that kid."

They seemed to see something patriotic in it.

The regiment was sorely proved during the campaign. The Captain conducted himself heroically and finally received the cross of honour. Then, the war ended, he returned to Rouen and the garrison.

Immediately upon his return he asked news of Irma, but no one was able to give him anything exact. Some said she was married to a Prussian major. Others, that she had gone to her parents, who were farmers in the suburbs of Yvetot.

He even sent his orderly to the mayor's office to consult the registry of deaths. The name of his mistress was not to be found.

He cherished a great sorrow, and was not at pains to conceal it. He even took the enemy to task for his unhappiness, attributing to the Prussians, who had occupied Rouen, the disappearance of the young girl, declaring:

"In the next war, they shall pay well for it, the beggars!"

Then, one morning as he entered the mess at lunch time, an old porter, in a blouse and oilcloth cap, gave him a letter, which he opened and read:

"My darling: I am in hospital, very ill, very ill. Will you not come and see me? It would give me so much pleasure!"

"IRMA."

The Captain grew pale and, moved with pity, declared:

"It's too bad! The poor girl! I will go there as soon as I have had lunch."

And during the whole time at the table, he told the officers that Irma was in hospital, and that he, by God, was going to get her out. It must be the fault of those unspeakable Prussians. She had doubtless found herself alone without a sou, broken down with misery, for they must certainly have stolen her furniture.

"Ah! the dirty swine!"

Everybody listened with great excitement. Scarcely had he slipped his napkin in his wooden ring, when he rose and, taking his sword from the peg, and thrusting out his chest to make his waist thin, hooked his belt and set out with hurried step to the city hospital.

But entrance to the hospital building, where he expected to enter immediately, was sharply refused him, and he was obliged to find his Colonel and ex-

plain his case to him in order to get a word from him to the director.

This man, after having kept the handsome Captain waiting some time in his ante-room, gave him an authorized pass and a cold and disapproving greeting.

Inside the door he felt himself constrained in this asylum of misery and suffering and death. A boy in the service showed him the way. He walked upon tiptoe, that he might make no noise, through the long corridors, where floated a musty odour of illness and medicines. From time to time a murmur of voices alone disturbed the silence of the hospital.

At times, through an open door, the Captain perceived a dormitory, with its rows of beds whose clothes were raised by the forms of bodies. Some convalescents were seated in chairs at the foot of their beds, sewing, and clothed in the uniform grey cloth dress with white cap.

His guide suddenly stopped before one of these corridors filled with patients. He read on the door, in large letters: "Syphilis." The Captain started; then he felt that he was blushing. An attendant was preparing some medicine at a little wooden table at the door.

"I will show you," said she, "it is bed 29."

And she walked ahead of the officer. She indicated a bed: "There it is."

There was nothing to be seen but a bundle of bed-clothes. Even the head was concealed under the coverlet. Everywhere faces were to be seen on the beds, pale faces, astonished at the sight of a uniform, the faces of women, young women and old

women, but all seemingly plain and common in the humble, regulation garb.

The Captain, very much disturbed, carrying his sword in one hand and his cap in the other, murmured:

"Irma."

There was a sudden motion in the bed and the face of his mistress appeared, but so changed, so tired, so thin, that he would scarcely have known it.

She gasped, overcome by emotion, and then said:

"Albert! — Albert! It is you! Oh! I am so glad — so glad." And the tears ran down her cheeks.

The attendant brought a chair. "Won't you sit down, sir?" she said.

He sat down and looked at the pale, wretched countenance, so little like that of the beautiful, fresh girl he had left. Finally he said:

"What is the matter with you?"

She replied, weeping: "You know well enough, it is written on the door." And she hid her eyes under the edge of the bed-clothes.

Dismayed and ashamed, he continued: "How did you catch it, my poor girl?"

She answered: "It was those beasts of Prussians. They took me almost by force and then poisoned me."

He found nothing to add. He looked at her and kept turning his cap around on his knees.

The other patients gazed at him, and he believed that he detected an odour of putrefaction, of contaminated flesh, in this corridor full of girls tainted with this ignoble, terrible malady.

She murmured: "I do not believe that I shall recover. The doctor says it is very serious."

Then she noticed the cross upon the officer's breast and cried:

"Oh! you have been decorated; now I am happy. How contented I am! If I could only embrace you!"

A shiver of fear and disgust ran through the Captain at the thought of this kiss. He had a desire to make his escape, to be in the clear air and never see this woman again. He remained, however, not knowing how to say good-bye, and finally stammered:

"You took no care of yourself, then."

A flame flashed in Irma's eyes: "No, the desire to avenge myself came to me when I should have broken away from it. And I poisoned them too, all, all that I could. As long as there were any of them in Rouen, I had no thought for myself."

He declared, in a constrained tone in which there was a little note of gaiety: "So far, you have done some good."

Getting animated, and her cheek-bones getting red, she answered:

"Oh! yes, there will more than one of them die from my fault. I tell you I had my revenge."

Again he said: "So much the better." Then rising, he added: "Well, I must leave you now, because I have only time to meet my appointment with the Colonel—"

She showed much emotion, crying out: "Already! You leave me already! And you have scarcely arrived!"

But he wished to go at any cost, and said:

"But you see that I came immediately; and it is absolutely necessary for me to be at the Colonel's at four o'clock."

She asked: "Is it still Colonel Prune?"

"Still Colonel Prune. He was twice wounded."

She continued: "And your comrades? Have some of them been killed?"

"Yes. Saint-Timon, Savagnat, Poli, Saprival, Robert, de Courson, Pasafil, Santal, Caravan, and Poivrin are dead. Sahel had an arm carried off and Courvoisin a leg crushed. Paquet lost his right eye."

She listened, much interested. Then suddenly she stammered:

"Will you kiss me, say, before you leave me? Madame Langlois is not there."

And, in spite of the disgust which came to his lips, he placed them against the wan forehead, while she, throwing her arms around him, scattered random kisses over his blue jacket.

Then she said: "You will come again? Say that you will come again — Promise me that you will."

"Yes, I promise."

"When, now. Can you come on Thursday?"

"Yes, Thursday —"

"Thursday at two o'clock?"

"Yes, Thursday at two o'clock."

"You promise?"

"I promise."

"Adieu, my dearie."

"Adieu."

And he went away, confused by the staring glances of the dormitory, bending his tall form

to make himself seem smaller. And when he was in the street he took a long breath.

That evening his comrades asked him: "Well, how is Irma?"

He answered in a constrained voice: "She has a trouble with the lungs; she is very ill."

But a little lieutenant, scenting something from his manner, went to headquarters, and, the next day, when the Captain went into mess, he was welcomed by a volley of laughter and jokes. They had got vengeance at last.

It was learned further that Irma had led a very gay life with the Prussian General Staff, that she had gone through the country on horseback with the colonel of the Blue Hussars, and many others, and that, in Rouen, she was no longer called anything but the "Prussians' woman."

For eight days the Captain was the victim of his regiment. He received by post and by messenger, notes from those who can reveal the past and the future, circulars of specialists, and medicines, the nature of which was inscribed on the package.

And the Colonel, catching the drift of it, said in a severe tone:

"Well, the Captain had a pretty acquaintance! I send him my compliments."

After some twelve days he was called by another letter from Irma. He tore it up in a rage, and made no reply to it.

A week later she wrote him again that she was very ill and wished to see him to say farewell.

He did not answer.

After some days more he received a note from a chaplain of the hospital.

"The girl Irma Pavolin is on her death-bed and begs you to come."

He dared not refuse to follow the chaplain, but he entered the hospital with a heart swelling with wicked anger, with wounded vanity, and humiliation.

He found her scarcely changed at all and thought that she had deceived him. "What do you want with me?" he asked.

"I wish to say farewell. It appears that I am near the end."

He did not believe it.

"Listen," said he, "you have made me the laughing-stock of the regiment, and I do not wish it to continue."

She asked: "What have I done?"

He was irritated at not knowing how to answer. But he said:

"Don't imagine I am coming back here to be joked by everybody on your account."

She looked at him with languid eyes, where shone a pale light of anger, and answered:

"What have I done to you? I have not been nice to you, perhaps! Is it because I have sometimes asked for something? But for you, I would have remained with M. Templier-Papon, and would not have found myself here to-day. No, you see, if anyone has reproaches to make it is not you."

He answered in a clear tone: "I have not made reproaches, but I cannot continue to come to see you, because your conduct with the Prussians has been the shame of the town."

She fell back suddenly in the bed, as she replied:

"My conduct with the Prussians? But when I tell you that they took me, and when I tell you that if I took no thought of myself, it was because I wished to poison them! If I had wished to cure myself, it would not have been so difficult, I can tell you! But I wished to kill them, and I have killed them, come now! I have killed them!"

He remained standing: "In any case," said he, "it was a shame."

She seemed to choke, and then replied:

"Why is it a shame for me to cause them to die and try to exterminate them, tell me? You did not talk that way when you used to come to my house in the Rue Jeanne d'Arc. Ah! it is a shame! You have not done so much, with your cross of honour! I deserve more merit than you, do you understand, more than you, for I have killed more Prussians than you!"

He stood dazed before her, trembling with indignation. He stammered: "Be still — you must — be still — because those things — I cannot allow — anyone to touch upon — "

But she was not listening: "What harm have you done the Prussians? Would it ever have happened if you had kept them from coming to Rouen? Tell me! It is you who should stop and listen. And I have done more harm than you, I, yes, more harm to them than you, and I am going to die for it,

B E D N O. 29

while you are singing songs and making yourself fine to inveigle women — ”

Upon each bed a head was raised and all eyes looked at this man in uniform, who stammered again:

“ You must be still — more quiet — you know — ”

But she would not be quiet. She cried out:

“ Ah! yes, you are a pretty poser! I know you well. I know you. And I tell you that I have done them more harm than you — I — and that I have killed more than all your regiment together — come now, you coward.”

He went away, in fact he fled, stretching his long legs as he passed between the two rows of beds where the syphilitic patients were becoming excited. And he heard the gasping, hissing voice of Irma pursuing him:

“ More than you — yes — I have killed more than you — ”

He tumbled down the staircase four steps at a time, ran off and shut himself up in his room.

The next day he heard that she was dead.

## THE PATRON

**H**E would never have dared to hope that such good fortune would be his! The son of a provincial Sheriff, Jean Marin had come to Paris, like so many others, to study law in the Latin Quarter. In the various cafés which he had successively patronized, he had made friends with a number of talkative students, who chattered about politics as they drank their beer. He developed great admiration for them and became their follower, even paying for their drinks when he happened to have any money.

Afterwards, he practised law and handled some suits, which he lost, when, one morning, he read in the papers that a friend of his student days had become a deputy. Again he became his faithful servant, the friend who discharges all the troublesome errands, whom one sends for when he is wanted, and with whom one stands on no ceremony.

But it so happened, by the chance of politics, that the deputy became a minister, and six months afterwards, Jean Marin was appointed State Councillor.

At first, he was so puffed up with pride that he almost lost his head. He would take walks just to show himself off, as if the people he met in the street could guess his position just by looking at him. He always managed to say to the various

## THE PATRON

tradespeople he dealt with, as well as to the news-dealers and even the cabmen:

“I, who am a State Councillor . . .”

He naturally experienced, as the direct result of his profession and his newly acquired dignity, an imperative desire to patronize. He would offer his influence to everyone he met, at all times, and with inexhaustible generosity.

When he ran up against a man he knew on the boulevard, he would rush up to him in a delighted manner, shake hands, inquire after his health and then, without waiting for any inquiry, would blurt out:

“You know I am State Councillor, and I am absolutely at your service. If there is anything I can do for you, I hope you will call on me unhesitatingly. In my position, a man can do a lot for his friends.”

Then he would go into some café with this friend and ask for some writing-paper and a pen and ink — “just one sheet, waiter, I want to write a letter of introduction.”

He wrote quantities of these letters, sometimes twenty, thirty, and fifty a day. He wrote them at the Café Américain, at Bignon’s, at Tortoni’s, at the Maison-Dorée, at the Café Riche, at the Helder, at the Café Anglais, at the Napolitain, everywhere. He addressed them to every official in the Republic, from magistrates to ministers. And he was happy, thoroughly happy.

One morning, as he was leaving his rooms to go to the State Council it began to rain. He was inclined to take a cab, but did not, finally deciding that he would walk.

## THE PATRON

The shower became very heavy, soaking the pavements, and inundating the streets. M. Marin was compelled to seek shelter in a doorway. An old priest had already taken refuge there, an old, white-haired priest. Before he had been appointed State Councillor, M. Marin did not care much for the clergy. But now, ever since a Cardinal had consulted him regarding some delicate matter, he treated the clergy with consideration. The downpour was so heavy that the two men were forced to take refuge in the concierge's box, to avoid getting splashed. M. Marin, who was constantly impelled to brag about himself, declared:

"A very bad day, monsieur l'abbé."

The old priest bowed:

"Ah! yes, monsieur, and it is all the more disagreeable when one is in Paris for a few days only."

"Ah! so you live in the provinces?"

"Yes, monsieur, I am only passing through Paris."

"Indeed, it is most annoying to have rain when one is spending a day or so in the capital. We officials, who live here all the year round, do not mind it."

The abbé made no reply and looked into the street, where the rain was beginning to stop a little. And suddenly clutching his gown in both hands, he resolved to brave the elements.

M. Marin, seeing him depart, shouted:

"You will get drenched, monsieur l'abbé. Wait a few minutes more, the rain will stop."

The old man wavered and then said:

"Well, I'm in a great hurry. I have a very urgent engagement."

## THE PATRON

M. Marin appeared very much concerned.

"But you will certainly be wet through. May I ask where you are going?"

The priest seemed to hesitate a moment, but then he said:

"I am going in the direction of the Palais-Royal."

"Well then, if you will allow me, monsieur l'abbé, I will offer you the shelter of my umbrella. I am going to the State Council. I am a State Councillor."

The old priest raised his eyes, looked at the speaker and exclaimed:

"I am greatly obliged to you, monsieur, and accept your offer with pleasure."

Then M. Marin took him by the arm, and they set out. He led him along, watching over him and giving advice:

"Be careful of this gutter, monsieur l'abbé. Look out for the carriage wheels, they throw mud all over one. Mind the umbrellas! Nothing is more of a danger to the eyes than the sharp ends of an umbrella! The women, especially, are so careless; they never mind anything and thrust their sun-shades and their umbrellas right under people's noses. And they never go out of anyone's way, either. They seem to think that they own the whole city. I think myself that their education has been sadly neglected."

And M. Marin chuckled gleefully.

The priest made no reply. He picked his way carefully along the streets, slightly bent, choosing with discrimination the dry spots on the pavement so as not to bespatter his shoes and gown.

## THE PATRON

M. Marin went on:

"I suppose you are in Paris for a little rest?"

The old man retorted:

"No, I have come on business."

"Oh! anything important? Might I inquire what it is? If I can be of service to you, I would only be too glad."

The abbé looked embarrassed. He mumbled:

"Oh! it's a little personal matter. A little difficulty with — with my bishop. It could hardly interest you. It is something about the adjustment — the adjustment of some ecclesiastical matter."

M. Marin became eager.

"Why, these matters are always referred to the State Council. In this case I wish you would make use of me."

"Yes, it is to the State Council I am going. You are most kind. I have an appointment with M. Lerepère and M. Savon, and maybe I will interview M. Petitpas also."

M. Marin came to a stop.

"Why, they are my friends, monsieur l'abbé, my dearest friends, fine fellows, all of them. I shall warmly recommend you to them. Rely on me."

The priest thanked him and protested his undying gratitude.

M. Marin was delighted.

"Oh! you can thank your stars, monsieur l'abbé, that you met me. You will see how smoothly everything will go now."

They finally reached the State Council. M. Marin conducted the priest to his office, installed him be-

## THE PATRON

fore the open fire and then sat down at his desk and wrote:

“My dear colleague, allow me to recommend most heartily to you a very worthy priest, M. l’abbé . . .”

He paused and inquired:

“Your name, please?”

“Abbé Ceinture.”

M. Marin wrote:

“M. l’abbé Ceinture, who needs your intercession in a little matter which he will lay before you.

“I am glad of this opportunity which allows me, my dear colleague, . . .”

And he concluded with the customary compliments.

After he had written the three letters, he handed them to his protégé who departed amid renewed protestations of gratitude.

M. Marin attended to his official duties, went home, spent a quiet day and slept peacefully that night. The next morning he woke up happy, dressed and sat down to read the papers.

The first one he opened was a radical organ. He read:

“Our Clergy and our Officials.

“There seems to be no end to the misdeeds of the clergy. A certain priest named Ceinture, convicted of having conspired against the existing government, accused of infamous acts, that we will not even mention, suspected besides of being a former Jesuit transformed into an ordinary priest, revoked by his bishop for reasons which are said to be unprintable, and summoned to Paris to ex-

## THE PATRON

plain his conduct, has found a warm partisan in the State Councillor, Marin, who did not hesitate to give this cassocked rascal the most enthusiastic letters of recommendation to all his Republican colleagues.

"We wish to call the minister's attention to the unqualifiable attitude of this State Councillor . . ."

M. Marin sprang to his feet, slammed down the paper and rushed off to see his colleague Petitpas, who exclaimed:

"Well you must have gone crazy to recommend that old conspirator to me."

Thoroughly bewildered, M. Marin retorted:

"No . . . no . . . you see, I was deceived myself. He looked like such a good man . . . he tricked me . . . he tricked me most shamefully. I beg of you to condemn him severely, most severely. I shall go myself to the Attorney General and the Archbishop of Paris, yes, to the Archbishop. . . ."

And he sat down abruptly at M. Petitpas' desk and wrote:

"My Lord: I have the honour to inform Your Grace that I have been made a victim of the intrigues and lies of a certain abbé Ceinture, who shamefully took advantage of my good faith.

"Misled by the protestations of this priest, I was induced . . ."

Then, after he had signed his name to the letter and sealed it, he turned to his colleague and remarked:

"Look here, my dear friend, I hope this will be a lesson to you never to recommend anyone."

## OLD MONGILET

**I**N the office old Mongilet was looked upon as an eccentric. He was an old employé, a good-natured creature, who had never been outside Paris but once in his life.

It was the end of July, and each of us, every Sunday, went to roll in the grass, or bathe in the river in the country near by. Asnières, Argenteuil, Chatou, Bougival, Maisons, Poissy, had their habitués and their ardent admirers. We argued about the merits and advantages of all these places, celebrated and delightful to all employés in Paris.

Old Mongilet would say:

“You are like a lot of sheep! A nice place, this country you talk of!”

And we would ask:

“Well, how about you, Mongilet? Don’t you ever go on an excursion?”

“Yes, indeed. I go in an omnibus. When I have had a good luncheon, without any hurry, at the wine shop below, I look up my route with a plan of Paris, and the time-table of the lines and connections. And then I climb up on top of the bus, open my umbrella and off we go. Oh, I see lots of things, more than you, I bet! I change my surroundings. It is as though I were taking a journey across the world, the people are so different in one street and another. I know my Paris better than anyone. And

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then, there is nothing more amusing than the entresols. You would not believe what one sees in there at a glance. One can guess a domestic scene simply at the sight of the face of a man who is roaring; one is amused on passing by a barber's shop, to see the barber leave his customer whose face is covered with lather to look out in the street. One exchanges heartfelt glances with the milliners just for fun, as one has no time to alight. Ah, how many things one sees!

"It is the drama, the real, the true, the drama of nature, seen as the horses trot by. Heavens! I would not give my excursions in the omnibus for all your stupid excursions in the woods."

"Come and try it, Mongilet, come to the country once just to see."

"I was there once," he replied, "twenty years ago, and you will never catch me there again."

"Tell us about it, Mongilet."

"If you wish to hear it. This is how it was: You knew Boivin, the old clerk, whom we called Boileau?"

"Yes, perfectly."

"He was my office chum. The rascal had a house at Colombes and always invited me to spend Sunday with him. He would say:

"Come along, Maculotte (he called me Maculotte for fun). You will see what a nice walk we shall take."

"I let myself be entrapped like an animal, and set out, one morning by the 8 o'clock train. I arrived at a kind of town, a country town where there is nothing to see, and I at length found my way to

## OLD MONGILET

an old wooden door with an iron bell, at the end of an alley between two walls.

"I rang, and waited a long time, and at last the door was opened. What was it that opened it? I could not tell at the first glance. A woman or an ape? The creature was old, ugly, covered with old clothes that looked dirty and wicked. It had chickens' feathers in its hair and looked as though it would devour me.

"What do you want?" she said.

"M. Boivin."

"What do you want of him, of M. Boivin?"

"I felt ill at ease on being questioned by this fury. I stammered: 'Why — he expects me.'

"Ah, it is you who are coming to lunch?"

"Yes," I stammered, trembling.

"Then, turning toward the house, she cried in an angry tone:

"Bovin, here is your man!"

"It was my friend's wife. Little Boivin appeared immediately on the threshold of a sort of barrack of plaster covered with zinc, that looked like a foot-warmer. He wore white duck trousers covered with stains and a dirty Panama hat.

"After shaking my hands warmly, he took me into what he called his garden. It was at the end of another alleyway enclosed by high walls and was a little square the size of a pocket-handkerchief, surrounded by houses that were so high that the sun could reach it only two or three hours in the day. Pansies, pinks, wallflowers and a few rose bushes were languishing in this well without air, and hot as an oven from the refraction of heat from the roofs.

## OLD MONGILET

“‘I have no trees,’ said Boivin, ‘but the neighbours’ walls take their place. I have as much shade as in a wood.’

“Then he took hold of a button of my coat and said in a low tone:

“‘You can do me a service. You saw the wife. She is not agreeable, eh? To-day, as I had invited you, she gave me clean clothes; but if I spot them all is lost. I counted on you to water my plants.’

“I agreed. I took off my coat, rolled up my sleeves, and began to work the handle of a kind of pump that wheezed, puffed and rattled like a consumptive as it emitted a thread of water like a Wallace drinking fountain. It took me ten minutes to fill the watering-pot, and I was in a bath of perspiration. Boivin directed me:

“‘Here — this plant — a little more; enough — now this one.’

“The watering-pot leaked and my feet got more water than the flowers. The bottoms of my trousers were soaking and covered with mud. And twenty times running I kept it up, soaking my feet afresh each time, and perspiring anew as I worked the handle of the pump. And when I was tired out and wanted to stop, Boivin, in a tone of entreaty, said as he put his hand on my arm:

“‘Just one more watering-pot full — just one, and that will be all.’

“To thank me he gave me a rose, a big rose, but hardly had it touched my button-hole than it fell to pieces, leaving only a hard little green knot as a decoration. I was surprised, but said nothing.

## OLD MONGILET

"Mme. Boivin's voice was heard in the distance: 'Are you ever coming? When I tell you lunch is ready!'

"We went towards the foot-warmer. If the garden was in the shade, the house, on the other hand, was in the blazing sun, and the sweating room in the Turkish bath is not so hot as was my friend's dining-room.

"Three plates at the side of which were some half-washed forks, were placed on a table of yellow wood in the middle of which stood an earthenware dish containing warmed-up boiled beef and potatoes. We began to eat.

"A large water bottle full of water lightly colored with wine attracted my attention. Boivin, embarrassed, said to his wife:

"See here, my dear, just on a special occasion, are you not going to give us some plain wine?"

"She looked at him furiously.

"So that you may both get tipsy, is that it, and stay here gabbing all day? Thanks for the special occasion!"

"He said no more. After the stew she brought in another dish of potatoes cooked with bacon. When this dish was finished, still in silence, she announced:

"That is all! Now get out!"

"Boivin looked at her in astonishment.

"But the pigeon — the pigeon you plucked this morning?"

"She put her hands on her hips:

"Perhaps you have not had enough? Because you bring people here is no reason why we should

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devour all that there is in the house. What is there for me to eat this evening?"

"We rose. Boivin whispered:

"Wait for me a second, and we will skip."

"He went into the kitchen where his wife had gone, and I overheard him say:

"Give me twenty sous, my dear."

"What do you want with twenty sous?"

"Why, one does not know what may happen. It is always better to have some money."

"She yelled so that I should hear:

"No, I will not give it to you! As the man has had luncheon here, the least he can do is to pay your expenses for the day."

"Boivin came back to fetch me. As I wished to be polite I bowed to the mistress of the house, stammering:

"Madame — many thanks — kind welcome."

"That's all right," she replied. "But do not bring him back drunk, for you will have to answer to me, you know!"

"We set out. We had to cross a perfectly bare plain under the burning sun. I attempted to gather a flower along the road and gave a cry of pain. It had hurt my hand frightfully. They call these plants nettles. And, everywhere, there was a smell of manure, enough to turn your stomach.

"Boivin said, 'Have a little patience and we will reach the river bank.'

"We reached the river. Here there was an odour of mud and dirty water, and the sun blazed down on the water so that it burned my eyes. I begged Boivin to go under cover somewhere. He took me

## OLD MONGILET

into a kind of shanty filled with men, a river boatmen's tavern.

"He said:

"This does not look very grand, but it is very comfortable."

"I was hungry. I ordered an omelet. But lo and behold, at the second glass of wine, that beggar, Boivin, lost his head, and I understand why his wife gave him water diluted.

"He got up, declaimed, wanted to show his strength, interfered in a quarrel between two drunken men who were fighting, and, but for the landlord, who came to the rescue, we should both have been killed.

"I dragged him away, holding him up until we reached the first bush, where I deposited him. I lay down beside him and, it seems, I fell asleep. We must certainly have slept a long time, for it was dark when I awoke. Boivin was snoring at my side. I shook him; he rose but he was still drunk, though a little less so.

"We set out through the darkness across the plain. Boivin said he knew the way. He made me turn to the left, then to the right, then to the left. We could see neither sky nor earth, and found ourselves lost in the midst of a kind of forest of wooden stakes, that came as high as our noses. It was a vineyard and these were the supports. There was not a single light on the horizon. We wandered about in this vineyard for about an hour or two, hesitating, reaching out our arms without coming to the end, for we kept retracing our steps.

"At length Boivin fell against a stake that tore

## OLD MONGILET

his cheek and he remained in a sitting posture on the ground, uttering with all his might long and resounding hallos, while I screamed 'Help! Help!' as loud as I could, lighting wax-matches to show the way to our rescuers, and also to keep up my courage.

"At last a belated peasant heard us and put us on our right road. I took Boivin to his home, but as I was leaving him on the threshold of his garden, the door opened suddenly and his wife appeared, a candle in her hand. She frightened me horribly.

"As soon as she saw her husband, whom she must have been waiting for since dark, she screamed, as she darted toward me:

"‘Ah, scoundrel, I knew you would bring him back drunk!’

"My, how I made my escape, running all the way to the station, and as I thought the fury was pursuing me I shut myself in an inner room as the train was not due for half an hour.

"That is why I never married, and why I never go out of Paris."

## THE CLOSET

AFTER dinner we were talking about women, for what else is there to talk about, among men? One of us said:

"By the way, I had a curious adventure of that kind." And this is what he told us:

"One evening last winter, I was suddenly taken with one of those depressing, overwhelming fits of lassitude, which seize upon one, body and soul, from time to time. I was at home alone, and I knew well that if I remained there I should have a frightful attack of despondency, of the kind that leads to suicide when they return often.

"I put on my overcoat and went out, without knowing at all what I was going to do. Having descended to the Boulevard, I began to walk along past the cafés, nearly empty, for it was raining. One of those fine rains was falling that dampen the spirits as much as the clothes; not one of those good showers, striking one in a cascade and driving pedestrians into doorways out of breath, but a rain so fine that one does not feel the drops, a humid rain that unceasingly deposits upon you imperceptible droplets and covers your clothing with a cold, penetrating moisture.

"What should I do? I went up and down, seeking some place to spend a couple of hours, and discovering, for the first time, that there was not a

## THE CLOSET

place of amusement in all Paris in the evening. Finally, I decided to enter the Folies-Bergères, that amusing woman market.

"There were very few people in the huge auditorium. In the long, semicircular promenade there were only people of no importance, whose vulgarity was apparent in their walk, their clothing, the cut of their hair and beard, their hats, and their complexion. There was hardly one man who looked clean, perfectly clean, and whose clothes were not odd. As for the girls they are always the same, as you know, plain, weary, drooping, walking with that quick step and that air of imbecile disdain which they assume, I know not why.

"I said to myself that truly not one of these flagging creatures, greasy rather than fat, either bloated or very thin, with the paunch of a prelate and their long legs bowed, was worth the louis that they obtained with much difficulty after having demanded five.

"But suddenly I perceived one of them, a little one that looked nice; not very young, but fresh, droll, and provoking. I stopped her and, stupidly, without thinking, set my price for the night. I did not wish to return home alone, all alone; I preferred rather the company and embraces of this creature.

"And so I followed her. She lived in a big, big house in the Rue des Martyrs. The gas was already extinguished on the staircase. I mounted slowly, constantly lighting wax-matches, striking the steps with my feet, stumbling and ill at ease, following a petticoat, the rustle of which I heard before me.

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"She stopped at the fourth story, and having shut again the outside door, she asked:

"'And you wish to remain until to-morrow?'

"'Yes. You know that was the agreement.'

"All right, my dear, I only wanted to know. Wait for me here a minute, I will return immediately."

"And she left me in the darkness. I heard her close two doors, then it seemed to me she was speaking with somebody. I was surprised and disturbed. The idea of blackmail occurred to me. But I have fists and solid muscles. 'We shall see,' thought I.

"I listened with all attention, both of ear and mind. Some one was moving, walking about, but with great precaution. Then another door was opened, and it seemed to me that I still heard talking, but in a very low voice.

"She returned, bringing a lighted candle. 'You can enter now,' she said.

"She spoke familiarly, as a sign of possession. I entered, and after having crossed a dining-room, where it was evident nobody ever dined, I entered a chamber like that of all these girls, a furnished room, with rep curtains, and eider-down silk quilt with suspicious-looking spots.

"She continued: 'Make yourself at home, my dear.'

"I inspected the apartment with an eye of suspicion. There seemed nothing disquieting, however. She undressed herself so quickly that she was in bed before I had my overcoat off. Then she began to laugh:

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“Well, what is the matter with you? Are you changed into a pillar of salt? Come! Make haste!”

“I imitated her and joined her. Five minutes later I had a foolish desire to dress again and go out. But the overwhelming lassitude which had seized me at my house, returned to me, depriving me of all strength to move, and I remained, in spite of the disgust which I had for this public bed. The sensual charm which I fancied I saw down there, under the lights of the theatre, had disappeared in my arms, and I had with me, flesh to flesh, only a vulgar girl, like all the rest, whose indifferent and com-plaisant kiss had an after-taste of garlic.

“I began to talk to her:

“Have you been here long?” said I.

“Six months the fifteenth of January.”

“Where were you before that?”

“I was in the Rue Clauzel. But the concierge made so much trouble that I left.”

“And she began to relate an interminable story of the concierge who had made some scandal about her.

“Suddenly I heard something moving near us. At first there was a sigh, then a slight but distinct noise, as if some one had stirred in a chair.

“I sat up quickly in bed and asked: ‘What was that noise?’

“She answered with tranquil assurance: ‘Don’t disturb yourself, my dear, it is my neighbour. The partition is so thin that we hear everything as if they were here. What rotten holes these are. They are made of pasteboard.’

“My indolence was so strong that I got down

## THE CLOSET

under the clothes again. We continued our talk. Incited by the curiosity which drives all men to question these creatures upon their first adventure, to wish to raise the veil from their first fault in order to find in them some far-off trace of innocence, that we may find something to love, perhaps, in the rapid recital evoked by their candour and the shame of long ago, I asked her about her first lover.

"I knew that she would lie. What did it matter? Among all the lies I might discover, perhaps, some sincere or touching incident.

"'Come,' said I, 'tell me who he was.'

"'He was an oarsman.'

"'Ah! Tell me about it. Where were you?'

"'I was at Argenteuil.'

"'What were you doing there?'

"'I was maid in a restaurant.'

"'What restaurant?'

"'At the Marin d'Eau Douce. Do you know it?'

"'Well, yes; Bonanfan's.'

"'Yes, that's the one.'

"'And how did he pay his court, this oarsman?'

"'While I was making his bed. He forced me.'

"But suddenly I recalled the theory of a doctor of my acquaintance, an observing, philosophic doctor who, in his practice in a great hospital, had daily examples of these girl-mothers and prostitutes, and knew all the shame and misery of women, the poor women who become the hideous prey of the wandering male with money in his pocket.

"'Invariably,' he told me, 'a girl is debauched by a man of her own class and station in life. I have made volumes of observations upon it. It is cus-

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tomary to accuse the rich of culling the flower of innocence from the children of the people. That is not true. The rich pay for the culled bouquet. They cull also, but at the second flowering; they never cut the first.'

"Then turning toward my companion, I began to laugh:

"Come now, I know all your story by heart. The oarsman was not the first, as you well know."

"Oh! yes, my dear, I swear it!"

"You are lying."

"Oh! no, I promise you I am not."

"You lie. Come, tell me the truth."

"She seemed to hesitate, astonished. I continued:

"I am a sorcerer, my good child, a hypnotist. If you do not tell me the truth, I shall put you to sleep, and then I can find it out."

"She was afraid, being stupid like her kind. She murmured:

"How did you ever guess it?"

"I replied: 'Come, speak.'

"Oh! the first time, it was almost nothing. There was a country holiday and a chef was called in for the occasion, M. Alexander. As soon as he came he had it all his own way in the house. He ordered everybody, even the master and mistress, as if he had been a king. He was a tall, handsome man who had hardly enough room to stand in front of the stove. He was always shouting: "Here, some butter — some eggs — some Madeira!" And you had to run to him with everything at once, or he

## THE CLOSET

would get angry and say things to you that would make you blush all over your body.

“When the day’s work was done he installed himself in front of the door and began to smoke. And, as I passed in front of him with a pile of plates, he said to me: “Hello, kid, won’t you come down to the edge of the river and show me the country?” I went, like a fool; and scarcely had we arrived at the bank when he forced me so quickly that I did not even know that it was done. And then he went away by the nine o’clock train, and I never saw him again after that.”

“I asked: ‘Is that all?’

“She stammered: ‘Oh! I believe Florentin belongs to him.’

“‘Who is Florentin?’

“‘He is my little boy.’

“‘Ah! very well. And you made the oarsman believe that he was the father, did you not?’

“‘Yes.’

“‘Had this oarsman money?’

“‘Yes, he left me an income of three hundred francs for Florentin’s support.’

“I began to be amused, and continued:

“‘Very well, my girl, very well. You are all less stupid than one would believe. And how old is Florentin now?’

“She answered: ‘Twelve years old. He will take his first communion in the spring.’

“‘That is good; and since that you have conscientiously followed your profession?’

“She sighed resignedly: ‘One does what one can.’

## THE CLOSET

“A loud noise in another part of the room made me leap out of bed with a bound; it was the noise of some one falling, then rising and groping with his hands upon the wall. I had seized the candle and was looking about, frightened and furious. She got up also and tried to hold me back, saying:

“It is nothing, my dear, I assure you it is nothing.”

“But I had discovered on which side of the wall this strange noise was. I went straight toward a concealed door at the head of the bed and opened it suddenly — and perceived there a poor little boy, trembling and staring at me with frightened eyes, a pale, thin little boy beside a large chair filled with straw, from which he had fallen.

“When he saw me, he began to cry and, opening his arms to his mother:

“It was not my fault, mamma, it was not my fault. I was asleep and I fell. You mustn’t scold me, for it was not my fault.”

“I turned toward the woman and said:

“What does he mean?”

“She seemed sad and embarrassed. But finally she said in a broken voice:

“What can you expect? I do not earn enough to put the child to school! I must take care of him somehow, and I cannot afford to hire another room. He sleeps with me when I have no one. When some one comes for an hour or two, he can stay in the closet very well and keep quiet; he knows how. But when one remains all night, as you have, his muscles are fatigued from sleeping on the chair — and it is not the child’s fault. I would like to see you —

## THE CLOSET

you — sleep all night on a chair — you would sing another song — ’

“She was angry, wrought up, and was shouting.

“The child was still crying. A poor child, delicate and timid, the child of the closet, of the cold, dark closet, a child who came from time to time to get a little warmth in the bed when, for a moment, it was empty.

“I, too, had an inclination to weep.

“I returned home to my own bed.”

## BOMBARD

LIFE often seemed very hard to Simon Bombard! He was born with an incredible capacity for doing nothing and with an immoderate desire to follow this vocation. All effort, whether moral or physical, every movement accomplished for a purpose, appeared to him beyond his strength. As soon as he heard anyone speak of anything serious he became confused, his mind being incapable of tension or even attention.

The son of a linen-draper in Caen, he took things easily, as they said in the family, until he was twenty-five years of age. But as his parents were always nearer bankruptcy than fortune, he suffered greatly for want of money.

He was a big, tall fine-looking fellow, with red whiskers, cut Norman fashion, of florid complexion, blue eyes, with the first signs of a paunch, and dressed with the swagger elegance of a provincial on a holiday. He laughed and gesticulated on every occasion, displaying a noisy good nature with all the assurance of the commercial traveler. He considered that life was made principally for love and laughter, and as soon as it became necessary to curb his noisy enjoyment, he fell into a kind of chronic somnolence, being incapable of sadness.

His need of money harassed him until he formed the habit of repeating a phrase now celebrated in

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his circle of acquaintance: "For ten thousand francs a year, I would become an executioner."

Now, he went each year to Trouville for a fortnight. He called this "spending the season." He would install himself at the house of his cousins, who gave him the use of a room, and from the day of his arrival to that of his departure he would promenade along the board walk which extends along the great stretch of seashore.

He walked with an air of confidence, his hands in his pockets or crossed behind his back, always clothed in ample garments, with light waistcoats and showy cravats, his hat somewhat over his ear and a cheap cigar in one corner of his mouth.

He went along, brushing up against the elegantly dressed women and staring contemptuously at the men like a fellow ready for a fight, and seeking — seeking — seeking.

He was after a wife, counting entirely upon his face and his physique. He said to himself: "Why the devil, in all the crowd that comes here, should I not be able to find what I want?" And he hunted with the scent of a foxhound, with the keen instinct of a Norman, sure that he would recognize her, the woman who would make him rich, the moment he perceived her.

One Monday morning he murmured: "Hello! hello! hello!" The weather was superb, one of those yellow and blue days of the month of July, when one might say that there was a deluge of heat. The vast shore covered with people, costumes, colours, had the air of a garden of women; and the

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fishing boats with their brown sails, almost immovable upon the blue water which reflected them upside down, seemed asleep under the great sun at ten o'clock in the morning. There they remained, opposite the wooden pier, some near, some further off, some still further, as if overcome by a summer day idleness, too indifferent to seek the open sea, or even to return to port. And in the distance one could vaguely perceive in the mist the coast of Havre, showing two white points on its summit, the lighthouses of Sainte-Adresse.

He said to himself: "Hello, hello, hello!" For he had passed her now for the third time and perceived that she had noticed him, this mature woman, experienced and courageous, who was making a bid for his attention. He had noticed her before, because she seemed also in quest of some one. She was an Englishwoman, rather tall, a little thin, an audacious Englishwoman whom circumstances and much journeying had made a kind of man. Not bad, on the whole, walking along slowly with short steps, soberly and simply clothed, but wearing a queer sort of hat as Englishwomen always do. She had rather pretty eyes, high cheek-bones, a little red, teeth that were too long and always visible.

When he came to the pier, he retraced his steps to see if she would meet him again. He met her and threw her an ardent glance, a glance which seemed to say: "Here I am!"

But how should he speak to her? He returned a fifth time, and when he was again face to face with her she dropped her parasol. He rushed forward, picked it up and presented it to her, saying:

## BOMBARD

"Permit me, Madame — "

She responded: "Oh, you are very kind!"

And then they looked at each other. They had nothing more to say. But she blushed. Then becoming courageous, he said:

"We are having beautiful weather here."

And she answered: "Oh, delicious!"

And then they again faced each other, embarrassed, neither thinking of going away. It was she who finally had the audacity to ask: "Are you going to be here long?"

He answered, laughing: "Oh! yes, about as long as I care to." Then suddenly he proposed: "Would you like to go down to the pier? It is pretty there on a day like this."

She simply said: "I should be much pleased."

And they walked along side by side, she with her stiff, rigid movements, he with the rolling swagger of a gander showing off in a farmyard.

Three months later the leading merchants of Caen received one morning a square white card which said:

"M. and Mme. Prosper Bombard have the honour to announce the marriage of their son, M. Simon Bombard, to Mme. Kate Robertson."

and on the other side:

"Mme. Kate Robertson has the honour of announcing her marriage to M. Simon Bombard."

They settled in Paris. The fortune of the wife

## BOMBARD

amounted to fifteen thousand francs a year free of incumbrances. Simon wished to have four hundred francs a month for his personal expenses. He had to prove that his tenderness merited this amount; he did prove it easily and obtained what he asked for.

At first everything went well. Young Mme. Bombard was no longer young, assuredly, and her freshness had undergone some wear; but she had a way of exacting things which made it impossible for anyone to refuse her. She would say, with her grave, wilful, English accent: "Oh! Simon, now we must go to bed," which made Simon start toward the bed like a dog that had been ordered, "To your kennel." And she knew how to have her way by day and night, in a manner there was no resisting.

She did not get angry; she made no scenes; she never raised her voice; she never had the appearance of being irritated or hurt, or even disturbed. She knew how to talk, that was all; and she spoke to the point, and in a tone that admitted no contradiction.

More than once Simon was on the point of rebelling; but against the brief and imperious desires of this singular woman he found himself unable to stand out. Nevertheless, when the conjugal kisses began to be meagre and monotonous, and he had in his pocket what would bring to him something greater, he paid for satiety, but with a thousand precautions.

Mme. Bombard perceived all this, without his knowing how; and one evening she announced to

him that she had rented a house at Mantes where they would live in the future.

Then existence became harder. He tried various kinds of pastimes which did not at all compensate for the feminine conquests for which he longed.

He fished, learned how to tell the places which the gudgeon liked, which the roach and carp preferred, the favourite spots of the bream and the kinds of bait that the different fish will take.

But in watching his floater as it trembled on the surface of the water, other visions haunted his mind. Then he became the friend of the chief of the office of the Subprefect and the captain of the police; and they played whist in the evening at the *Café du Commerce*, but his sorrowful eye would disrobe the queen of clubs or of diamonds, while the problem of the absent legs on these two-headed figures would confuse the images awakened in his mind.

Then he conceived a plan, a typical specimen of Norman cunning. He would have his wife take a maid who suited him; not a beautiful girl, a coquette, fond of clothes, but a gawky woman, rough and strong-backed, who would not arouse suspicions and whom he had carefully coached in his plans.

She was recommended to them by the collector of tolls, his accomplice and obliging friend, who guaranteed her in every way. And Madame Bombard accepted with confidence the treasure they brought to her.

Simon was happy, happy with precaution, with fear, and with unbelievable difficulties. He could

## BOMBARD

never escape the watchful eye of his wife, except for a few short moments from time to time, and then without security. He sought some plan, some stratagem, and he ended by finding one that succeeded perfectly.

Madame Bombard, who had nothing to do, retired early, while Bombard, who played whist at the *Café du Commerce*, returned each evening at half past nine, exactly. He got Victorine to wait for him in the passageway of his house, under the vestibule steps, in the darkness.

He only had five minutes or more for he was always in fear of a surprise; but five minutes from time to time sufficed for his ardour, and he slipped a louis into the servant's hand, for he was generous in his pleasures, and she would quickly remount to her garret.

And he laughed, he triumphed all alone, and repeated aloud, like King Midas's barber fishing for whitebait from the reeds on the river bank: "Fooled, old girl!"

And the happiness of having fooled Madame Bombard made up to him in great part for the imperfection and incompleteness of his salaried conquest.

One evening he found Victorine waiting for him as was her custom, but she appeared to him more lively, more animated than usual, and he remained perhaps ten minutes at the rendezvous in the corridor.

When he entered the conjugal chamber, Madame Bombard was not there. He felt a cold chill run

down his back and sank into a chair, tortured with fear.

She appeared with a candlestick in her hand. He asked trembling:

“You have been out?”

She answered quietly: “I went to the kitchen for a glass of water.”

He forced himself to calm his suspicions of what she might have heard; but she seemed tranquil, happy, confident, and he was reassured.

When they entered the dining-room for breakfast the next morning, Victorine put the cutlets on the table. As she turned to go out, Madame Bombard handed her a louis which she held up delicately between her two fingers, and said to her, with her calm, serious accent:

“Here, my girl, here are twenty francs which I deprived you of last night. I return them to you.”

And the flabbergasted girl took the gold piece, gazing at it stupidly, while the terrorized Bombard looked at his wife with wide-open eyes.

## ROOM NO. ELEVEN

“WHAT! You do not know why President Amandon was transferred?”

“No, not at all.”

“As far as that is concerned, neither did he ever know it. But it is a story of the strangest sort.”

“Tell it to me.”

“I am sure you remember Madame Amandon, that pretty brunette, thin, and so distinguished and pretty that she was called Madame Marguerite in all Perthuis-le-Long?”

“Yes, perfectly.”

“Very well, then. You recall also how much she was respected and considered, and better loved than anyone in the town; she knew how to receive, how to organize a fête or a charity fair, how to find money for the poor, and how to please the young people in a thousand ways.

“She was very elegant and very coquettish, nevertheless, but in a Platonic fashion, and with the charming elegance of the provinces, for she was a provincial, this pretty little woman, an exquisite provincial.

“The poets and writers, who are all Parisian, sing to us of the Parisian woman and of her charm, because they know only her; but I declare here that the woman from the provinces is worth a hundred times more, when she is of superior quality.

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"The provincial has an attraction all her own, more discreet than that of the Parisienne, more humble, promising nothing and giving much, while the Parisienne, for the most part, promises much but gives nothing when she is undressed.

"The Parisian woman is the elegant and brazen triumph of artificiality; the provincial, an example of the modesty of truth.

"Yet the wide-awake provincial, with her air of homely alertness, her deceitful, schoolgirl candour, her smile which means nothing, and her good little passions, direct and tenacious, is capable of a thousand times more deceit, artifice, and feminine invention than all the Parisiennes together, for gratifying her own tastes or vices, and that without awakening suspicion, or scandal, or gossip in the little town which watches her with all its eyes from all its windows.

"Madame Amandon was a type of this rare but charming race. Never had anyone suspected her, never had anyone thought that her life was not as limpid as her look, a sly look, transparent and warm, but seemingly so honest — you should have seen it!

"Then she had admirable tact, a marvellous ingenuity and power of invention, and unbelievable simplicity.

"She picked all her lovers from the army and kept them three years, the time of their sojourn in the garrison. In short, she gratified, not her heart but her senses.

"When some new regiment arrived at Perthuis-le-Long, she informed herself about all the officers between thirty and forty years of age — for, before

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thirty one is not discreet, and after forty, one is often feeble.

"Oh! she knew the list of officers as well as the Colonel did. She knew all, all the habits, manners, instruction, education, physical qualities, the power of resistance to fatigue, the character, whether patient or violent, the fortune, and the tendency to closeness or prodigality of each of them. Then she made her choice. She gave preference to men of calm exterior, like herself, but they must be handsome. She also wished them to have had no previous entanglements, any passion having the power to leave traces, or that had made any trouble. Because the man whose loves are mentioned is never very discreet.

"After having decided upon the one she would love for the three years of his regulation sojourn, it only remained for her to set her cap at him.

"How many women would find themselves embarrassed, would have taken ordinary means, following the way of others, having court paid them, marking off all the stages of conquest and resistance, allowing their fingers to be kissed one day, their wrist the next, their cheek the following, then the lips, then the rest. She had a method more prompt, more discreet, and more sure. She gave a ball.

"The chosen officer was invited to dance with the mistress of the house. Then, in waltzing, led on by the rapid movement, bewildered by the intoxication of the dance, she would press against him as if surrendering herself, and hold his hand with a nervous, continued pressure.

"If he did not understand, he was only a fool,

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and she passed on to the next, classed as number two, on the list of her desires.

"If he understood, the thing was done, without fuss, without compromising gallantries, without numerous visits.

"What could be simpler or more practical?

"How well women might follow a similar procedure, in order to let us know that they like us! How many difficulties, hesitations, misunderstandings that would obviate! How often we pass by, without knowing it, a possible happiness,—without suspecting it, because we are unable to penetrate the mystery of thought, the secret abandon of the will, the mute appeal of the flesh, the unknown soul of a woman whose mouth preserves silence, whose eye is impenetrable and clear.

"When the man understood, he asked for a rendezvous. But she always made him wait a month or six weeks in order to watch and be sure that he had no dangerous faults.

"During this time he was racking his brain to think of some place where they could meet without peril, and imagining combinations difficult and unsafe.

"Then, at some official feast, she would say to him in a whisper:

"'Go on Tuesday evening, at nine o'clock, to the Hôtel du Cheval d'Or, near the ramparts, on the Vouziers road, and ask for Mademoiselle Clarisse. I shall be waiting for you. And be sure to be in mufti.'

"For eight years she had in fact rented this furnished room by the year, in this obscure inn. It

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was an idea of her first lover which she found practical, and after the man departed, she kept the nest.

"Oh! it was a mediocre nest; four walls covered with gray paper adorned with blue flowers, a pine bedstead under muslin curtains, an arm-chair bought at her order by the innkeeper's wife, two chairs, a bedside rug, and some necessary articles for the toilette,—what more was needed?

"Upon the walls were three large photographs. Three colonels on horseback; the colonels of her lovers! Why not? It would not do to preserve the true likeness, the exact likeness, but she could perhaps keep some souvenirs by proxy.

"And she had never been recognized by anyone in all these visits to the Cheval d'Or, you ask?

"Never, by anyone!

"The means she employed were admirable and simple. She had thought out and organized some charity reunions and religious meetings, some of which she attended, others she did not. Her husband, knowing her good works, which cost him dear, lived without suspicions. Then, when a rendezvous had been agreed upon, she would say at dinner, before the servants:

"I am going this evening to the Association for making flannel bandages for the paralysed old men."

"And she went out about eight o'clock, went straight to the Association, came out again immediately, passed through divers streets, and, finding herself alone in some little street, in some sombre corner without a light, she would take off her hat, replace it by a maid's cap which she carried under

her cape, fold a kerchief after the same fashion and tie it over her shoulders, carrying her hat and the garment she had worn in a napkin; she would go trotting along, full of courage, her hips uncovered, like a good little maid that had been sent upon some errand; and sometimes she would even run, as if she were in a great hurry.

“Who could have recognized in this trim servant the lively wife of President Amandon?

“She would arrive at the Cheval d’Or, go up to her room, to which she had the key, and the big proprietor, Maître Trouveau, seeing her pass his desk, would murmur:

“‘There is Mademoiselle Clarisse coming to meet some lover.’

“He had indeed guessed something, the rogue, but did not try to learn more, and he would certainly have been much surprised to find that his client was Madame Amandon, or Madame Marguerite, as she was called in Perthuis-le-Long. And this is how the horrible discovery took place.

“Never had Mademoiselle Clarisse come to her meeting-place two evenings in succession, never! being too nice and too prudent for that. And Maître Trouveau knew this well, since not once in eight years had he seen her come the next day after a visit. Often, therefore, in days of need, he had disposed of her room for a night.

“Now, last summer, Monsieur Amandon absented himself from home for a week. It was in July. Madame was ardently in love, and as there was no fear of being surprised, she asked her lover, the handsome Major Varangelles, one Tuesday

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evening on leaving him, if he wished her to return the next day.

"He replied: 'How can you ask!'

"And it was agreed that they should return at the usual hour on Wednesday. She said to him in a low tone:

"If you arrive first, my dear, you can wait for me in bed."

"Then they embraced and separated. The next day, as Maître Trouveau sat reading '*Les Tablettes de Perthuis*', the Republican organ of the town, he cried out to his wife, who was plucking a fowl in the courtyard:

"Here! the cholera has broken out in the country. There was a man died yesterday of it in Vauvigny." But he thought no more about it, his inn being full of people, and business very good.

"Towards noon a traveller presented himself on foot, a kind of tourist, who ordered a good breakfast, after having drunk two absinthes. And, as he was very warm, he absorbed a bottle of wine and two bottles of water at least. Then he took his coffee and his little glass of liqueur, or rather three little glasses, and feeling rather drowsy he asked for a room where he might sleep for an hour or two. There was no longer a vacant room, and the proprietor, after consulting his wife, gave him Mademoiselle Clarisse's.

"The man went in there and, about five o'clock, as he had not been seen coming out, the landlord went to wake him. What was his astonishment to find him dead!

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"The innkeeper descended to find his wife: 'Listen,' he whispered to her, 'the tourist I put in number 11, I believe is dead.'

"She raised her arms, crying: 'It's not possible! Lord God! It is the cholera!'

"Maître Trouveau shook his head:

"'I should rather believe that it was a cerebral congestion, seeing that he is as black as the dregs of wine.'

"But the mistress was frightened and kept repeating:

"'We must not mention it. We must not talk of it. People will say it is cholera. Go and make the report and say nothing. They will take him away in the night, and no one will know about it. 'Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise.'"

"The man murmured: 'Mademoiselle Clarisse was here yesterday, the room will be free this evening.'

"And he found the doctor who made out the certificate, 'From congestion after a copious repast.' Then he made an agreement with the commissioner of police to remove the dead body towards midnight, so that there might be no suspicion about the hotel.

"It was scarcely nine o'clock when Madame Amandon went secretly up the staircase of the Cheval d'Or, without being seen by anyone. She reached her room, opened the door, and entered. A candle was burning upon the chimney-piece. She turned toward the bed. The major, she thought, was already there and had closed the curtains.

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"She said to him: 'One minute, darling, and I am coming.'

"And she undressed with a feverish haste, throwing her boots upon the floor and her corset upon the arm-chair. Then, her black dress and skirts having fallen in a circle around her, she stood in her red silk chemise like a flower that has just blossomed.

"As the major said not a word, she asked:

"'Are you asleep, my big dear?'

"He did not answer, and she began to laugh, murmuring:

"'Wait! He is asleep. It is too funny!'

"She kept on her black silk openwork stockings and, running to the bed, slipped in quickly, seizing him full in her arms and kissing him on the lips, in order to wake him suddenly. It was the cold dead body of the traveller.

"For one second she remained immovable, too frightened to comprehend anything. But the cold of this inert flesh penetrated her own, giving her an atrocious fright before her mind had time to reflect.

"She made a bound out of the bed, trembling from head to foot; then running to the chimney-piece, she seized the candle, returned, and looked! And she perceived a frightful face that she had never before seen, black, swollen, with eyes closed, and a horrible grimace of the jaw.

"She uttered a cry, one of those piercing interminable cries which women utter in their fright, and, letting fall the candle, she opened the door and fled, unclothed, down the passage, continuing to scream

in frightful fashion. † A commercial traveller, in his socks, who occupied room number 4, came out immediately and received her in his arms.

“He asked, much startled: ‘What is the matter, pretty dear?’

“She stammered out, terrified: ‘Some one has been killed — in — my room!’

“Other guests appeared. The landlord himself ran out.

“And suddenly the tall figure of the major appeared at the end of the corridor. When she saw him, she threw herself toward him, crying:

“‘Save me, save me, Gontran — some one has been killed in our room.’

“Explanations were difficult. Maître Trouveau, however, told the truth and demanded that they release Mademoiselle Clarisse, for whom he vouched with his own head. But the commercial traveller in socks, having examined the dead body, declared that a crime had been committed, and he convinced the other guests that Mademoiselle Clarisse and her lover should not be allowed to depart.

“They were obliged to await the arrival of the police commissioner, who gave them their liberty, but was not discreet.

“The following month, President Amandon received promotion with a new place of residence.”

## A WOMAN'S HAIR

THE walls of the cell were bare and white-washed. A narrow, barred window, so high that it could not easily be reached, lighted this bright, sinister little room; the madman, seated on a straw chair, looked at us with a fixed eye, vague and troubled. He was very thin, with wrinkled cheeks and almost white hair that had evidently grown white in a few months. His clothes seemed too large for his dried-up limbs, his shrunken chest, and hollow body. One felt that this man had been ravaged by his thoughts, by a thought, as fruit is by a worm. His madness, his idea, was there in his head, obstinate, harassing, devouring. It was eating his body, little by little. It, the Invisible, the Impalpable, the Unseizable, the Immaterial Idea gnawed his flesh, drank his blood, and extinguished his life.

What a mystery, this man killed by a Thought! He is an object of fear and pity, this madman! What strange dream, frightful and deadly, can dwell in his forehead, to fold such profound and ever-changing wrinkles in it?

The doctor said to me: "He has terrible paroxysms of rage, and is one of the strangest lunatics I have ever seen. His madness is of an erotic, macabre kind. He is a sort of necrophile. He has written a journal which shows as plainly as daylight

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the malady of his mind. His madness is visible, so to speak. If you are interested, you may run through this document."

I followed the doctor into his office and he gave me the journal of this miserable man.

"Read it," said he, "and give me your opinion about it."

Here is what the little book contained:

"Up to the age of thirty-two years I lived quietly, without love. Life appeared to me very simple, very good, and very easy. I was rich. I had a taste for so many things that I had never felt a passion for anything. It was good to live! I awoke happy each day, to do things which it pleased me to do, and I went to bed satisfied, with a calm hope for the next day and a future without care.

"I had had some mistresses without ever having my heart torn by desire or my soul bruised by love after the possession. It is good to live thus. It is better to love, but it is terrible. Still those who love like everybody else should find happiness, less than mine, perhaps, for love has come to me in an unbelievable manner.

"Being rich, I collected ancient furniture and antiques. Often I thought of the unknown hands which had touched these things, of the eyes that had admired them, and the hearts that had loved them — for one does love such things! I often remained for hours and hours looking at a little watch of the last century. It was so dainty, so pretty with its enamel and gold embossing. And it still went, as on the day when some woman had bought it, delighted in

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the possession of so fine a jewel. It had not ceased to palpitate, to live its mechanical life, but had ever continued its regular ticktack, although a century had passed. Who then had first carried it upon her breast, in the warmth of the dress — the heart of the watch beating against the heart of the woman? What hand had held it at the ends of its warm fingers, then wiped the enamelled shepherds, tarnished a little by the moisture of the skin? What eyes had looked upon this flowered dial awaiting the hour, the dear hour, the divine hour?

"How I should have liked to see her, to know her, the woman who had chosen this rare and exquisite object. But she is dead! I am possessed by a desire for women of former times; from a distance I love all those who loved long ago. The story of past tenderness fills my heart with regrets. Oh! the beauty, the smiles, the caresses of youth, the hopes! Should not these things be eternal!

"How I have wept, during whole nights, over the women of old, so beautiful, so tender, so sweet, whose arms opened to love, and who are now dead! The kiss is immortal! It goes from lip to lip, from century to century, from age to age! Men take it and give it and die.

"The past attracts me, the present frightens me, because the future is death. I regret all that which is gone, I weep for those who have lived; I wish to stop the hour, to arrest time. But it goes, it goes on, it passes away, and it takes me, from second to second, a little of me for the annihilation of tomorrow. And I shall never live again.

"Farewell, women of yesterday, I love you.

## A WOMAN'S HAIR

"And yet I have nothing to complain of. I have found her whom I awaited, and I have tasted through her of inconceivable pleasure.

"I was roaming around Paris on a sunny morning, with joyous foot and happy soul, looking in the shops with the vague interest of a stroller. All at once I saw in an antique shop an Italian piece of furniture of the xvith century. It was very beautiful, very rare. I decided it must be by a Venetian artist, named Vitelli, who belonged to that epoch. Then I passed on.

"Why did the remembrance of this piece of furniture follow me with so much force that I retraced my steps? I stopped again before the shop to look at it, and felt that it tempted me.

"What a singular thing is temptation! One looks at an object, and, little by little, it seduces you, troubles you, takes possession of you like the face of a woman. Its charm enters into you, a strange charm which comes from its form, its colour, and its physiognomy. Already one loves it, wishes it, desires it. A need of possession seizes you, a pleasant need at first, because timid, but increasing, becoming violent and irresistible. And the dealers seem to suspect, from the look of the eye, this secret, increasing desire. I bought that piece of furniture and had it carried to my house immediately. I placed it in my room.

"Oh! I pity those who do not know this honeymoon of the collector with the object which he has just acquired. He caresses it with his eye and hand as if it were flesh; he returns every moment to it, thinks of it continually, wherever he goes and

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whatever he may be doing. The thought of it follows him into the street, into the world, everywhere. And when he re-enters his house, before even removing his gloves or his hat, he goes to look at it with the tenderness of a lover.

"Truly, for eight days I adored that piece of furniture. I kept opening its doors and drawers; I handled it with delight and experienced all the intimate joys of possession.

"One evening, in feeling the thickness of a panel, I perceived that there might be a hiding-place there. My heart began to beat and I passed the night in searching out the secret, without being able to discover it.

"I came upon it the next day by forcing a piece of metal into a crevice in the panelling. A shelf slipped, and I saw, exposed upon a lining of black velvet, a marvellous head of woman's hair!

"Yes, a head of hair, an enormous twist of blond hair, almost red, which had been cut off near the skin and tied together with a golden cord.

"I stood there stupefied, trembling and disturbed! An almost insensible perfume, so old that it seemed like the soul of an odour, arose from this mysterious drawer and this most surprising relic.

"I took it gently, almost religiously, and lifted it from its resting-place. Immediately it unwound, spreading out its golden billows upon the floor, where it fell, thick and light, supple and brilliant, like the fiery tail of a comet.

"A strange emotion seized me. To whom had this belonged? When? Under what circumstances? Why had this hair been shut up in this piece of fur-

## A WOMAN'S HAIR

niture? What adventure, what drama was hidden beneath this souvenir? Who had cut it off? Some lover, on a day of parting? Some husband, on a day of vengeance? Or, perhaps, the woman herself, whose hair it was, on a day of despair? Was it at the hour of entering the cloister that she had thrown there this fortune of love, as a token left to the world of the living? Was it the hour of closing the tomb upon the young and beautiful dead, that he who adored her took this diadem of her head, the only thing he could preserve of her, the only living part of her body that would not perish, the only thing that he could still love and caress and kiss, in the transport of his grief?

"Was it not strange that this hair should remain there thus, when there was no longer any vestige of the body with which it was born?

"It curled about my fingers and touched my skin with a singular caress, the caress of death. I felt myself affected, as if I were going to weep.

"I kept it a long time in my hands, then it seemed to me that it had some effect upon me, as if something of the soul still remained in it. And I laid it upon the velvet again, the velvet blemished by time, then pushed in the drawer, shut the doors of the closet, and betook myself to the street to dream.

"I walked straight ahead, full of sadness, and full of trouble, of the kind of trouble that remains in the heart after the kiss of love. It seemed to me I had lived in former times, and that I had known this woman.

"And Villon's lines rose to my lips, like a sob:

## A WOMAN'S HAIR

Dictes-moy où, ne en quel pays  
Est Flora, la belle Romaine,  
Archipiada, ne Thaïs,  
Qui fut sa cousine germaine?  
Echo parlant quand bruyt on maine  
Dessus rivière, ou sus estan;  
Qui beauté eut plus que humaine?  
Mais où sont les neiges d'antan?

. . . . .

La royne blanche comme un lys  
Qui chantoit à voix de sereine,  
Berthe au grand pied, Bietris, Allys,  
Harembouges qui tint le Mayne,  
Et Jehanne la bonne Lorraine  
Que Anglais bruslèrent à Rouen?  
Où sont-ils, Vierge souveraine?  
Mais où sont les neiges d'antan?

"When I returned to my house I felt an irresistible desire to see my strange treasure again. I took it up and felt it, and in touching it a prolonged thrill ran through my body.

"For some days, however, I remained in my ordinary state, although the thought of this hair never left me. Whenever I came in, it was my first desire to look at it and handle it. I would turn the key of the desk with the same trembling that one has in opening the door of one's mistress, for I felt in my hands and in my heart a confused, singular, continual, sensual desire to bury my fingers in this charming rivulet of dead hair.

"Then, when I had finished caressing it, when I had returned it to its resting-place, I always felt that it was there, as if it were something alive, con-

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cealed, imprisoned; I felt it and I still desired it; again I felt the imperious need of touching it, of feeling it, of enervating myself to the point of weakness, by contact with this cold, smooth, irritating, exciting, delicious hair.

"I lived thus for a month or two, I no longer know how long, with this thing possessing me, haunting me. I was happy and tortured, as in the expectation of love, as one is after the avowal which precedes the embrace.

"I would shut myself up alone with it in order to feel it upon my skin, to bury my lips in it, to kiss it, and bite it. I would roll it around my face, drink it in, drown my eyes in its golden waves, in order to see life golden through it.

"I loved it! Yes, I loved it. I could no longer live away from it, nor be contented an hour without seeing it. I expected — I expected — what? I know not — her!

"One night I was suddenly awakened with a feeling that I was not alone in my room. I was alone, however. But I could not go to sleep again; and, as I was tossing in the fever of insomnia, I rose and went to look at the twist of hair. It appeared to me sweeter than usual, and more animated.

"Could the dead return? The kisses with which I warmed it made me swoon with happiness, and I carried it to my bed and lay down with it, pressing it to my lips, as one does a mistress he hopes to enjoy.

"The dead returned! She came! Yes, I saw her, touched her, possessed her as she was when alive in former times, large, blond, plump, with cool breasts,

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and with hips in the form of a lyre. And I followed that divine, undulating line from the throat to the feet, in all the curves of the flesh, with my caresses.

"Yes, I possessed her, every day and every night. The Dead Woman had returned, the beautiful Dead Woman, the Adorable, the Mysterious, the Unknown, and she returned every night.

"My happiness was so great that I could not conceal it. I found in her a superhuman delight, the profound, inexplicable joy of possessing the Impalpable, the Invisible, the Dead! No lover ever tasted joys more ardent or more terrible.

"I knew not how to conceal my happiness. I loved it so much that I could not bear to leave it. I carried it with me always, everywhere. I walked with it through the city, as if it were my wife, conducting it to the theatre and to restaurants as one would a mistress. But they saw it,— and guessed — they took me, and threw me into prison, like a malefactor. They took it away — oh! misery! —"

The manuscript stopped there. And suddenly, as I raised my wondering eyes to the doctor, a frightful cry, a howl of fury and exasperated desire filled the asylum.

"Listen," said the doctor, "it is necessary to douse that obscene maniac with water five times a day. Sergeant Bertrand is not the only man who fell in love with the dead."

I stammered, moved with astonishment, horror, and pity: "But that hair — did it really exist?"

The doctor got up, opened a closet full of vials and instruments, and threw me, across his office, a

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long thick rope of blond hair, which flew towards me like a golden bird.

I trembled as I felt upon my hands its caressing, light touch. And I stood there, my heart beating with disgust and desire, the disgust we have in coming in contact with objects connected with crimes, and the desire which comes with the temptation to test some infamous and mysterious thing.

Shrugging his shoulders, the doctor added: "The mind of man is capable of anything."







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